

== BERT TABOR'S DARING DECOY! ==

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THE DOWN-FAST DETECTIVE IN NEVADA



OR, The Sons of Thunder.

BY LEON LEWIS,

CHAPTER I.
THE RIVAL CAMPS.

At the eastern foot of the Humboldt Range of mountains, in Elko county, northwestern Nevada, there are two pretty lakes which have always fixed attention, the more especially as the old emigrant road to California passed near them.

They are named Franklin and Ruby.

Their general trend is north and south, one following the other, and Franklin is the most northern.

They are about fifteen miles in length, and run parallel with the range beside them, and as close to it as possible.

Ruby averages three miles in width, while

BERT TABOR HAD NEARLY REACHED THE BEACH, WHEN TWO MEN BOUNDED

The shores of both are more or less rocky and wooded.

The neck of land between the two is five miles wide, and sufficiently elevated in the center to overlook both lakes to a considerable distance.

In the vicinity of these two lakes, in the summer of 1886, were two mining-camps.

The one exclusively Mormon.

The other exclusively Gentile.

Hence they were passionately rivals, and "bad blood," as the phrase goes, had always existed between them.

The Gentile camp was at the northwestern angle of Ruby Lake, on a crest which overlooked it, and scarcely a quarter of a mile from it.

Behind it was a ravine leading up into the range, and having a fair supply of water every month in the year except during July and August.

Two miles south of it, and about that distance west of the lake, in a striking foot-hill, is a wonderful historic cavern, which was a favorite haunt in the olden time of the Piutes, who were once the sole occupants of the whole neighborhood.

On the eastern shore of Lake Ruby, and directly east of the Gentile camp, is a famous hot spring which, from time immemorial, has been one of the favorite headquarters of the tribe of red-skins we have mentioned.

As is known to all Western readers, every mining district bears its own proper name, and the one now under notice is called the Cave District, from its renowned cavern.

The Mormon camp was situated thirteen miles north of the other, abreast of the center of Franklin Lake, and at the point where it is widest.

It was further from its lake than its rival, being something more than a mile from the shores.

It was also in a depression, and surrounded in such a way by woods and rocks that it was easy to reach it and leave it unnoticed.

Near it, on the north, was a creek which furnished an ample supply of water at all seasons, having its rise in the eternal snows of the Humboldt Range of mountains.

The population of each of these camps had long averaged two hundred.

Both were "five-stamp camps," and each had a model smelter.

But both were flourishing upon hopes, rather than upon their actual outputs, and such had always been their condition. The returns not only remained scanty, but they were secured at a disagreeable outlay of cash and labor.

Many of the miners had gone away discouraged, and were still going, but the places of these withdrawers had been taken by newcomers.

To be candid, there was a strange and fascinating tradition hanging over the Ruby Valley. It was said that this name itself had come from the fact that the valley possessed wonderful mines of rubies, in addition to extraordinary stores of gold and silver.

Some fine specimens had been found, and, circulating constantly from hand to hand, did a great deal to keep the attention of both camps fixed upon the tradition in question.

Everybody expected to strike it rich from one day to another.

At one time it was reported that the Mormons had found the desired spot, and then arose as much excitement in the Gentile camp as in a nest of hornets when a stick is run through it.

At another time it was rumored that the Gentiles had found an enormous deposit of rubies in a certain gully, and it was then the turn of the Mormons to hold their breath in envy, bitterness and wonder.

Naturally enough, with these exciting circumstances, collisions were frequent between the rival miners on the lakes and roads, and in the woods and hills between the two camps.

Everybody went armed, like a footpad, and both camps were ruled in such strict military fashion that a mouse could not have invaded either without being captured.

Despite their ill-luck, the Mormons had sworn to remain there forever, rather than retire and leave their hated enemies in possession, and this sentiment was cordially reciprocated by the Gentiles.

But this was not all.

To the general causes of ill-will, rivalry and hostility to which we have alluded, had been added others of a more personal nature, which could not have failed to result, in due course, in a violent collision.

In the Mormon camp, the leader, chief, captain or principal man—whatever we may call him—was a man named Gummidge, a coarse, illiterate fellow, barely able to read and write, who was said to be an ex-captain of road-agents.

Gummidge was a violent Mormon and a ready tool of the Mormon plotters, who had come into the State from Utah, and who were bending all their faculties and resources to their fixed purpose of securing possession of it.

Gummidge had organized the miners in his camp into an organization which he called the "Sons of Thunder," and they had raided and robbed with such violence, cruelty and oppres-

sion, that they had already become a terror throughout the adjacent regions.

Strange expeditions left that camp and returned to it, by favor of its retired and lonely situation, and wild deeds and terrible outrages were beginning to be traced to it, especially since the advent of a high Mormon official into the vicinity, a certain Bishop Ruddle, a crafty and unscrupulous prelate of the "Church of the Latter Day Saints," who seemed to have taken the Mormon camp of Franklin Lake under his special patronage and approval.

The recognized head of the Gentile camp was a New Yorker named Hatton, who had won the grade of colonel in the late war, and who was admired and loved by all who knew him.

The colonel's career had been adventurous and remarkable, as we shall have occasion to see.

He had known Nevada and the Overland Route from early in the fifties, when the "California gold fever" had first drawn him across the plains, and had had in those days some curious personal experiences which will have their place in the events which now claim our attention.

The colonel's family consisted of his wife and their daughter, whom he had left at the East on the occasion of his last return to Nevada, with the understanding that they would join him at the desired moment.

The colonel's deputy and representative, as well as constant friend and companion, was a noble young fellow named Bert Tabor, who had been working a claim in the Cave District a couple of years, and who had taken charge of the Gentile camp two or three times in the colonel's absence.

Out of the facts and personages thus presented was destined to come a stirring and fateful drama of real life, which we will proceed to relate.

CHAPTER II.

THE QUESTION OF RUBIES.

On a high bluff at the south end of Franklin Lake, a couple of horsemen had dismounted under an immense pine, to give their jaded steeds a breathing spell, about the middle of a warm, but pleasant afternoon in June, in the year already indicated, 1886.

The first was a tall, spare man, of kindly and commanding aspect, with a full beard and whitish hair, whose age could not have been less than sixty years.

Despite his naturally dark complexion, which showed the bronzing effects of wind and sun, this man looked feeble and wasted, and his features displayed a worried and strangely pained expression.

He was Colonel Hatton, the chief of the Gentile camp.

His companion was a beau ideal of the knights of the plains, keen of eye and strong and athletic, as good of heart as courageous and daring, with a splendid face and figure, and with long, curling hair which fell to his shoulders.

This fine specimen of the Western hero was of course no other than Bert Tabor, the colonel's alter ego, despite the difference in their ages.

Bert was barely one-and-twenty.

The two men had thrown themselves in lazy and picturesque attitudes upon the ground, but had leaned their rifles against the pine, and still retained their hold of their bridles in a way which attested that they did not intend to be surprised by a prowling enemy through any want of caution.

As attested by their watchful glances, they were keenly alive to the fact that they might have to deal with some of their enemies of the Mormon camp at any moment.

"Well, Bert, it seems that we have had our labor for our pains," remarked the elder horseman, with a sigh. "Not a trace of my missing wife, whose fate becomes more and more a horrible mystery from one moment to another. Not a word from my daughter, either in response to your late communications or to mine."

"It's very strange, Colonel Hatton," returned Bert, with a regret and gloom almost as marked as his chief's. "It must be that there is something wrong in the post-office. Perhaps our letters have not been forwarded! Or may not Miss Effie's replies have been intercepted?"

"I certainly begin to incline to this latter proposition," avowed Colonel Hatton. "That Gail, the postmaster, may really be a Mormon at heart, and a tool of the Mormon leaders. But I am not going to submit to this state of affairs, by any means. After this long and fruitless ride in the hot sun, I shall write again to Effie and send my letter through some other office."

As weary as worried, the colonel drew from an inner pocket a small flask in which he carried a strengthening cordial, and took a swallow.

"Well, well," he then resumed with another long sigh, "we must be thankful that things are no worse than they are, and continue to hope for the best. It's quite possible, you know, that a letter from my wife has miscarried, and she may be all right, either at our old home or on the way here, and not have the least suspicion of the misery I am enduring. As to

Effie, she was visiting a school friend in Albany at last accounts, and she is doubtless the object of many attentions and kept constantly occupied, so that it is no wonder if she has let a few days slip away without bringing me a letter."

Bert nodded assent to these views, but not without sundry mental reservations. To his sharp and watchful mind, the very air was full of "plots, treasons and spoils."

"It is undeniable, of course, that the Mormons are pressing into the State," resumed Colonel Hatton, "and it's equally clear that they have the well-defined intention of keeping possession of it, with all its machinery of State and county government. It is also certain that a large portion of the new-comers are ready to resort to almost any violence and crime to suppress the Gentiles. Just now our neighbors of the other camp seem particularly jealous and venomous."

"They may have started another rumor that we have found that ruby-mine which haunts them so severely," suggested Bert.

"Possibly. Something's in the wind, clearly enough."

"Do you think they can have found any rubies?" pursued Bert, after a thoughtful pause.

"Quite likely," and the colonel looked singularly serious, almost pained at his young friend's suggestion. "I happen to know, of my own experience, that the Ruby Valley is rightly named."

"That it contains rubies, you mean?"

"Yes, Bert. There are bushels of rubies within fifty miles of us, if we knew where to look for them," declared the colonel, with the quiet deliberation of a man who knows just what he is talking about. "There is, in fact, a lost mine of rubies somewhere in this neighborhood, and it was once my good fortune to possess some tangible evidences or samples of its treasures."

"In the olden days, you mean—"

"Yes, thirty-three years ago; the first time I ever saw these hills and valleys," explained the colonel. "I was taken very ill on that occasion, while we were encamped on the south bank of that gulch at the middle of Franklin Lake, on the east shore, and ran away from the wagon-train, in a fit of delirium, so that my associates were obliged to go on without me. The next thing I knew, I was in the tent of a Piute chief, whose squaw had nursed me into life. In due course I became an adopted son of the chief, and was treated like one of the family, so that I had a chance to learn all the secrets and traditions of this tribe of Indians. It was through these experiences that I got into the ruby business," and the colonel smiled, "as I was obliged to remain among the Piutes nearly a year before I found an opportunity of continuing my journey to the Sacramento. I've often thought of relating to you that episode of my life, which is quite generally known to my Eastern friends and acquaintances, and I will do so one of these days, when my mind is free from this worry. I'll only say now that all the wonderful traditions of the Piutes about the existence of rubies in this valley are warranted by my own experiences and knowledge."

"And why can there not be precious stones hereabouts, as well as in Brazil or India?" returned Bert, thoughtfully.

"They can be, and they are! You must remember that the mineral and metallic wealth of the New World is not even suspected. It's safe to say that all the gold and silver mines which have already been discovered in America do not represent a thousandth part of our natural treasure, and that discoveries will be made within a very few years which will almost wipe out the memory of all that has hitherto been done in this direction!"

"No doubt of it," returned Bert, "and I hope it will be our luck to make one of these strikes. Perhaps our rivals of the other camp have already done so."

"There's another thing they may have done, too," added the colonel uneasily. "They may have got hold of that Piute chief of whom I have spoken—my adopted father! He's now a very old man and is feeble and childish, but I learned yesterday that he is still living, burrowed with a mere remnant of his people in some cave or other retreat in the unexplored depths of one of the mountain ranges near us. Ah! if Mee-an-kah—for such is the name of this chief—should fall into the hands of Gummidge, and tell all he knows!"

"What a pity it would be!" cried Bert. "We ought to try and find him. Since you are his adopted son, he might be turned to great account."

"Oh, I shall certainly try to resume acquaintance with him, if only to keep Gummidge and his crew from misusing him or preying upon him," declared the colonel. "They might rob him, or even kill him. While I was with him, thirty-three years ago, Mee-an-kah wore habitually on his breast, concealed under his shirt, a leather bag containing handfuls of the finest rubies I have ever seen, and some of which were said to have been handed down by the chiefs and medicine-men of the tribe for hundreds of years. Mee-an-kah wore this bag as a charm,

and also displayed it as an insignia on great occasions. If the old man is now feeble and helpless, it would be too bad if these greasy Mormons were to get hold of him and steal his rubies—perhaps murder him for them—to say nothing of inducing him or forcing him to reveal the secret of the lost mine!

"But does Mee-an-kah know where the ruby mine actually is, colonel?" asked Bert breathlessly.

"Without the least doubt. He once promised me to tell me where it is, and would have done so if I had remained longer with him. As you suggest, we must try to find him. It will not be easy for the Mormons, however, even if they get hold of him, to find out all he knows. Mee-an-kah is a priest as well as king of his people, and it will not be easy for them to wrest his secrets from him."

CHAPTER III.

A SINISTER SCHEME.

WITH a sudden start, Bert Tabor sprang to his feet excitedly, whipping out a powerful field-glass and carrying it to his eyes.

"By Jove!" he cried, "that sail-boat we saw, with a girl alone in it, has upset!"

"Indeed!" returned Colonel Hatton, as he also leaped to his feet.

"Yes, there it is, not a hundred yards from the shore, as you can see through that rift in the bushes," declared the younger horseman.

He passed the glass to the colonel, and added: "See! the girl is trying to climb upon the bottom of the boat, and is screaming for assistance. She must have come from the Mormon camp, but that is no reason why we should leave her to perish. Look out for yourself a few minutes, colonel, and I'll go and pull her ashore."

Throwing his bridle over a broken limb, Bert hurried away toward the scene of disaster, descending the bluff rapidly to the water.

As he reached the pebbly beach, he noticed that the wind was blowing from the north, and realized that the boat would soon drift ashore at a point not far from him.

Nevertheless, as the screams of the girl had redoubled at sight of him, he decided to go to her rescue, and bounded toward the lake, hastily divesting himself of his neat-fitting jacket as he ran.

A good swimmer, it did not take him long to reach the capsized sail-boat, and to give his support to the girl clinging to it.

"Do not be afraid, miss," he said. "There's no danger, not a particle."

The girl seemed to have realized the fact unaided, for her screams had ceased.

"We've only to hold on and keep quiet," added Bert, "and we shall drift into shallow water."

The girl assented, clinging nervously to him.

"Who—who are you, sir?" she faltered, blushing scarlet, as her glances kept coming and going upon his handsome face.

"My name is Albert Tabor. My friends generally call me Bert. And you, if I may be so bold?"

"I—I am Millsie, the daughter of Bishop Ruddle."

"The Mormon!" was Bert's involuntary comment.

"But I am not a Mormon," declared Millsie, as her cheeks became still redder. "I am the child of Bishop Ruddle's first and only wife."

To this Bert bowed with the air of one who politely assents to things in which he has no especial interest.

The girl was unmistakably beautiful, but after a robust and obtrusive fashion which Bert did not at all fancy, and he hardly gave her a second glance.

There was, to be sure, a reason for this indifference, which we may as well mention.

Bert was in love with a girl he had never seen—with the colonel's daughter.

About six weeks before the opening date of our narrative, the Mormons had made an attempt to capture the colonel, one day, when he and Bert were taking a stroll on the peninsula, and would have succeeded if Bert had not given them the hottest kind of a reception.

As it was, Bert saved the colonel from captivity, although he had to carry him away from the scene of the encounter upon his shoulders.

For two weeks the terribly wounded man had lain between life and death, but the care he received from Bert, seconded by his naturally strong constitution, had finally pulled the patient out of danger.

That point assured, the colonel had dictated to Bert a letter for his wife and daughter.

Thus brought into close relations with the estimable ladies, Bert had naturally given them considerable attention, and had answered, at the colonel's suggestion, various appeals for further and newer details of the sufferer's condition.

And thus had grown up a sort of acquaintance, which had been intensified by a photograph the colonel had given Bert of Miss Effie.

If these things rendered the young man insensible to the charms of Millsie Ruddle, they did not render her insensible to his manly

beauty. Her glances kept returning to his face, and she clung to him a great deal closer than was required by the situation.

"Are we not in great danger?" she asked, as the boat rocked heavily upon a crest of the waves.

"No, Miss Ruddle. We are in no danger whatever. As you can see at a glance, we have only to drift as much as we have already drifted, and we can then wade ashore. Is this your boat?"

"Yes, Mr. Tabor. It is one papa gave me for use on the lake, I am so fond of the water."

"It is none the less a boat I have seen near the Mormon camp for a year past," observed Bert, looking at the boat and sail critically.

"Didn't you come from the Mormon camp?"

The girl started, averting her face, from which the blood began receding rapidly.

But she faltered a negative.

"It's odd that you should upset, too, in such a mild, steady breeze as this, if you know enough about handling a boat to be trusted alone in it," pursued Bert, with a dawning suspicion that there was something wrong about Miss Millsie.

"Did a squall strike you?"

Instead of answering, the girl glanced as nervously as keenly into the bushes upon the adjacent shore, while every trace of color left her face.

"Oh, I am so sorry!" she faltered.

"Sorry for what?"

"That we didn't meet under other circumstances. I—I am sure you will never forgive me!"

"Forgive you for what?"

Ere Miss Millsie could answer, the sharp report of a rifle rung over the scene from beneath the pine where Bert had left the colonel, and was quickly followed by a second.

Bert started, glanced at the girl and then at a double spiral of smoke under the pine—and then let go of the boat, with a violent push backward, striking out for the shore.

In vain the girl resumed her wild screams. He did not so much as look back at her.

What's more, his sternly-set features attested that he had comprehended her character and purpose only too clearly.

Miss Millsie was a *decoy*!

The boat had been capsized purposely!

If Bert had conceived the least doubt of the fact, he would have been quickly and terribly enlightened.

He had nearly reached the beach when two men bounded out, rifle in hand, from the concealment afforded by the bushes so plentifully lining the shore, and advanced to meet him, leveling their weapons.

"Surrender!" cried the foremost assailant.

"You are our prisoner! The least resistance, and you die!"

The swimmer did not answer. He did not even miss a stroke, but continued his advance shoreward as quietly as rapidly.

But he comprehended the situation.

Some of the active spirits of the rival camp had set out to capture him and the colonel, and Miss Millsie was assisting in the plot.

Another moment, and Bert touched bottom, with a boulder of twenty tons between him and his assailants.

"Surrender!" repeated both in chorus, dancing about and leveling their rifles. "Surrender!"

"Not just yet," was Bert's answer.

He had now reached a spot where the water was less than waist deep, and he had little trouble in drawing his revolver from the waterproof pocket of his mountain shirt.

As he did so, he noticed that the girl had ceased to scream, and that she was watching the scene with breathless interest.

With the favor of the huge boulder, which sheltered him from the fire of his enemies, he had no difficulty in dropping them both in rapid succession.

Then he sprang out of the water, caught up his jacket, and bounded up the bluff with the vigor of a chamois, unheeding the screams which had broken out with redoubled vigor behind him.

CHAPTER IV.

A SUGGESTIVE ENCOUNTER.

AT the top of the bluff he encountered Colonel Hatton, who was a little whiter than usual, but who received him with a grim smile of triumph and satisfaction, handing him his rifle.

"The villains will have to try it again, Bert," was the colonel's greeting. "Are you injured?"

"Not in the least, sir. And you?"

"Not so much as a scratch. You heard my shots, no doubt? I caught a glimpse of my two lurking rascals before you had reached the water, and at once jumped to the conclusion that some scheme was under foot against us. It was too late to call you back or warn you, but I hastily secured the horses to a sapling, and carelessly took up a position near the rifles. As the couple rushed forth to capture me, I gave one a broken arm, and the other a useless leg, quickly having them at my mercy and binding them hand and foot, at the same time threatening

them with death if they so much as moved or uttered a word."

"Good. Where are they now?"

"Yonder, on the ground, just the other side of the big pine. And you, Bert? How have you left things behind you?"

"Well, I think one of my couple is considerably damaged," answered Bert. "The pressure was really too great for me to mince matters."

"And the girl? Have you ever seen her before?"

"Never. She announced herself as the daughter of the Mormon bishop, but I cannot say how true the statement may be, as I readily detected that she was lying about other matters."

"The whole adventure amounts to this, then, that the Mormons have made another attempt at my capture?" assumed the colonel.

"Or for the capture of both of us," amended Bert. "They must have seen us when we went up the east shore, on our way to the post-office, and have laid their plans accordingly. It was foreseen, of course, that I would go to the girl's rescue, and the intention was to take us separately and at a disadvantage. But, let's mount and get away, as these men may have confederates near us."

The suggestion was instantly acted upon, and the couple galloped swiftly toward the Gentile camp, soon leaving the scene of their peril out of sight behind them.

"Of course they meant to capture us alive," observed the colonel thoughtfully. "Their intention is just as clear now as it was the day I was so dangerously wounded. But, what can be the moving cause of these repeated attempts to capture me? Is it vengeance?"

"Hardly, I should think, sir," replied Bert. "To be sure, we wounded two or three of the gang, in the former encounter, but if they had wanted revenge for that, they would have lurked for us to-day by the roadside and shot us down without even showing themselves."

"That's logic, certainly. We must suppose, then, that they have some more hidden motive. Can it be that they hope to get a great pile of ransom money for us? They'd like to break up our camp, no doubt, but can they imagine that our capture is a step in that direction? They may have heard that we have made some great discoveries, and they may have resolved to force us to tell them all we know. Can you suggest any better theory than this?"

Before Bert Tabor could reply, his attention was attracted to a cloud of dust which had appeared above the tree-tops beyond a bend in the road about a quarter of a mile distant, in the direction he and the colonel were riding.

"Do you see that, sir?" he asked, with a wave of the hand. "Evidently some one is coming rapidly in this direction from the Mormon camp!"

"Allies of these cut-throats, no doubt!" muttered the colonel. "We did not leave the scene of battle an instant too soon!"

Bert looked at the moving cloud of dust a few moments keenly.

"You are right, colonel," he replied. "Would it not be prudent to turn into the bushes, and keep out of sight? They are certainly Mormons, and it's quite possible that they may have some connection with the attack which has just been made upon us!"

Colonel Hatton heeded the suggestion, leading the way into a dense group of young pines the couple chanced to be passing.

Dismounting, and taking their horses firmly by the bits, they secured a good place of concealment from which to reconnoiter the approaching party, and began watching intently.

"As I thought, it's a carriage," observed Bert, in a whisper, after a brief interval of waiting. "Hear it, sir?"

"Yes, Bert. And there it comes around the bend."

Little more was said until the carriage was within a dozen rods of the watchers.

"Know the driver?" then asked Colonel Hatton.

"I do," answered Bert, with a start. "He's that 'Captain Lightning' who commanded the 'Sons of Thunder' who made that other attack upon you!"

"So he is! He feigning as a coachman! What can be the intention of such a masquerade?"

"Perhaps we shall know more when we can see whom he is driving!" answered Bert.

The driver's seat was so high, or the body of the vehicle so low—or both—that the occupants of the carriage could not be seen until it had arrived within a few rods of the spot where the colonel and his young friend were concealed.

"By Jove!" suddenly whispered Bert, with another violent start. "I know the man now! He's that Mormon bishop, who has lately moved into Nevada from Salt Lake City, and of whom I was speaking to you this morning—Bishop Ruddle!"

Colonel Hatton took one good look at the man in question, and then gave such a start of surprise, and seemed so thoroughly upset, that the younger man extended a hand to sustain him.

"That Bishop Ruddle?" he gasped, as the

carriage continued to roll nearer, bringing other occupants into view.

"It is, sir!"

"Well, I know him under another name," said the colonel hurriedly. "He was raised in the same town, in Buffalo county, I originally came from, and I was for a long time quite intimate with him, both before and after my first visit to Nevada. His real name is *Norman Daggett*. But, who's that with him?"

The colonel's eyes had settled upon the figure seated beside the bishop, and which had now appeared completely in view, and his glances seemed glued even more wonderingly to this second figure than they had been to the bishop himself.

"Great heavens!" he faltered, as the carriage arrived abreast of him. "See, Bert—see!"

The picture was indeed well worthy of the attention suggested.

It was that of a very, very old Indian, displaying all the feather and bauble of his people, who was evidently as weak as emaciated, but who, nevertheless, possessed a dignity and stateliness of character which seemed to defy the ravages of time and decay.

"How changed he is with all these years, Bert!" pursued the colonel. "And yet, he's the same! I should know him anywhere! He's the old Piute chief of whom I was speaking, my adopted father of other days, *Mee-an-kah*!"

Bert saw by one swift glance at the face of Colonel Hatton that there was no mistake in this declaration, and he drew his breath sharply, while his features became convulsed, as if with pain.

"And that laughing Minnehaha who sits in front of the couple," pursued the colonel, as his glances turned to the third occupant of the carriage, a charming young Indian girl, in the gayest of skirts, and as radiant as the day under her bright head-dress and mantle, "she can only be one of *Mee-an-kah*'s grandchildren, or possibly his youngest daughter! What a pity! This fraud of a bishop has captured the whole family! He's after those rubies and the lost mine! And that's not the worst!" added the colonel, with a violent start, as he clasped his hands to his forehead, with the air of a man who has received an awful and sudden shock. "Oh! my poor wife! I see it all now!"

And the startled man sunk unnerved and helpless to the ground.

CHAPTER V.

A STARTLING LIGHT UPON THE SITUATION.

BERT TABOR assisted the colonel to his feet, and steadied his trembling frame, waiting for the explanation which he knew would be forthcoming.

The colonel stared after the singularly-assorted group until it was shut out from view by the back of the bishop's carriage, and then he turned a pale and startled face toward his young companion.

"Are you sure, Bert, that this man is Bishop Ruddle?" he demanded.

"Perfectly sure, sir!" assured Bert. "I've seen him a dozen times, in the pulpit and out of it, and heard him addressed by that name, as well as spoken of by it!"

"And yet he is really one of my old acquaintances, and his real name is *Norman Daggett*," declared the colonel, continuing to look after the retreating vehicle. "I have not seen him since he went West, as a fugitive from justice and in thorough disgrace, after coming out of prison, nearly a score of years ago, but I have too many reasons for remembering him to have the least doubt now in regard to his identity!"

"Was he your enemy?" asked Bert, whose thoughts had been busy.

"He was!"

"Perhaps you assisted in consigning him to prison?"

"I did, Bert. I was obliged to be a witness against him."

He mounted, as did Bert, and the couple took their way back to the road, turning their faces anew toward the Gentile camp.

"I will give you some other reasons why I remember that man so well, Bert," resumed the colonel, as they began jogging quietly away. "One of them is that he was once a suitor for my wife's hand, and that he even tried to force his attentions upon her after he knew that she was engaged to me."

Bert again started with a look of keen comprehension.

The significance of the colonel's avowals could not have possibly escaped him, after his own rapid reflections.

"Why, it seems to me, colonel, in view of these various suggestive facts," he declared, "that the mystery of your wife's disappearance is a mystery no longer. It's as plain as day that she has fallen into the hands of Bishop Ruddle."

"Just so, Bert!" avowed the colonel, with a sigh that came from the depths of his soul. "The moment I realized the presence of the bishop in this neighborhood, that moment the light came! In realizing his identity, I could not resist the conviction that he is the author of my wife's strange disappearance! He has long been aware of my presence in Nevada,

and has doubtless had his eye upon me, as upon my affairs, ever since he came from Utah. In fact, the very sight of that man floods my soul with the most startling revelations! He swore, again and again, to my wife's face, all these years ago, that he would have a terrible revenge upon her, sooner or later, for preferring me to him, and it's now only too evident that the villain is keeping his oath!"

"Exactly, colonel. Does this man know what happened to you thirty-three years ago in Nevada? I mean your acquaintance with *Mee-an-kah*?"

"Certainly. He knows all about it."

"And all about those traditions of these Indians, with their rubies and lost mines?"

"Without a doubt, Bert. I made no secret of the matter, in the days when this man and I were acquainted."

"Then the whole situation is as plain as day, colonel," declared Bert. "The bishop is at the bottom of this war upon you. You had no trouble until he took up his abode in the Ruby Valley. His coachman took the lead in the former assault upon us. He himself is now hastening to the scene of the late attack. Greed and revenge are equally active in urging him on. He wants to get you out of the way and secure the rubies of *Mee-an-kah*. Then there is that girl upon the boat, who says she is his daughter, and who certainly joined in the attempt of his vile minions to capture us—"

"Say no more, Bert," interrupted Colonel Hatton, with the accents of thorough conviction. "That man is the author of all these villainies! The sight of him has opened my eyes as nothing else could. Having my wife in his hands, his next thought is to effect my capture, as a necessary step toward getting rid of me altogether. Ah! my God!"

"What is it, colonel?"

"Why, it strikes me that he may intend to torture my poor wife through me! A whole abyss of horrors seems to have suddenly opened at my feet! Everything that has happened, or is happening, needs no other explanation than that afforded by the discovery of this man's presence!"

The colonel drew rein abruptly, looking back in the direction in which his terrible enemy and rival had vanished.

"Let's follow him," he proposed, with a face as eager as determined. "Let's see if he really has any connection with our late assailants!"

Bert assented, wheeling his horse, and the couple rode back, with due caution, soon nearing the scene of the recent encounter.

The men they had left bound and helpless near the great pine were no longer there, but voices were heard on the shore of the lake, and the watchers advanced under cover to the edge of the bluff which Bert had descended and ascended so quickly.

What they saw, as they looked down upon the beach, was edifying, to say the least.

The carriage was there, with its top raised, and *Mee-an-kah* had gone to sleep in his seat beneath the shelter thus afforded.

The Indian girl had alighted, and stood arm-in-arm with Millsie Ruddle, who had attired herself in a fresh suit of clothes, which had evidently been brought her by her father, and which she had as evidently donned in one of the adjacent thickets.

The boat had been righted and made ready for its return to the Mormon camp, chiefly through the exertions of the bishop and his coachman, and the wounded men had been placed in it and made as comfortable as the resources of the party permitted.

At a gesture from the bishop, Millsie and the young Indian seated themselves in the carriage.

"There! you can go back to the camp," said the bishop to his men, in the boat, "and give your wounds better attention. I'm sorry you've botched the job again, but it's a long lane that knows no turning! I'm especially sorry for this blood-letting, but you shall have a gold piece for every day you are laid up, and you ought to be thankful that you have escaped with your lives. By-by!"

He waved his hand, one of the wounded men cast off the rope which had held the craft to the bowlder, and the boat went away upon the port tack for its destination.

"And now for home, Millsie," added the bishop, as he seated himself in the carriage opposite his daughter, while the coachman took his place on the box. "It's too bad that our little plot has proved a failure, but it's rare that anything worth having can be had for the asking. We shall try again!"

The carriage rolled away, soon vanishing in the gap by which it had descended to the beach, and the colonel and Bert once more wheeled their horses and set their faces in the direction of the Gentile camp.

"The game is a deep one, Bert," the colonel remarked, gloomily. "We shall have to play sharp to win it!"

And then succeeded a long silence.

CHAPTER VI.

EXCITING NEWS.

THE colonel and Bert Tabor arrived in due course at the Gentile camp and proceeded leis-

urely up one of the long slopes of an adjoining foothill to the colonel's dwelling.

It was a new frame house of medium size, two stories in height, with a fine cellar, and with surrounding gardens and lawns and drives of remarkable beauty.

It had just been built in anticipation of the arrival of the colonel's wife and daughter from the State of New York, and was in itself a sufficient announcement of the colonel's intention to become a permanent resident of Nevada.

The owner had moved into it in preference to remaining in the rude hut he had occupied within the camp, but the last coat of paint was not yet fully dry upon its exterior and the most of the rooms were still wholly unused.

"A nice place, colonel," complimented Bert, as he dismounted under a grand pine a dozen rods from the front entrance. "This is what I say to myself every time I return to it."

The colonel heaved a deep sigh as he also dismounted, and a young Swede, his stable-boy, advanced to take charge of the horses and lead them away to the stable in the rear of the dwelling.

"Yes, I like the place," returned Colonel Hatton, as he took possession of one of the shaded rustic chairs under the great pine. "But I shall be sorry I have spent so much money here, if my wife and daughter do not soon brighten us up with their presence."

"Oh, they will soon be with you, colonel," assured Bert, with the ready enthusiasm which belongs to one-and-twenty years of age. "And they cannot fail to be delighted with their new home. I know of only one nicer place this side of Elko, and that, curiously enough, is the residence of Bishop Ruddle!"

"Ah, you know where the bishop lives, then?" queried the colonel, with a start of sudden interest.

"By mere chance—yes, sir."

"Then I shall ask you to pilot me to the spot, if this mystery of my wife's disappearance is not soon cleared up," pursued the colonel, thoughtfully. "I begin to think that all explanations of this riddle are to be sought in that quarter."

"Possibly, colonel. But yonder comes Morgan, and he rides as if he were the possessor of exciting news."

At the mention of this name the colonel gained his feet with anxious eagerness.

Hardy Morgan was one of the most prominent miners in the Gentile camp, and a man of good character and capacity.

He had formerly been a detective, in an Eastern city, and for this reason had been charged by the colonel to give his best attention to the painful problem presented by the failure of Mrs. Hatton to make her appearance at the time fixed for her arrival.

"Sure enough, Morgan has got something to tell us," said Colonel Hatton, supporting himself against the back of the chair from which he had arisen. "Heaven grant that he may be able to take this load from my heart, which troubles me more than did that Mormon bullet."

Nothing more was said until the detective had ridden up hastily and dismounted.

"Good news and yet bad news, colonel," he hastened to say sympathetically, as he offered his hand. "I have learned that Mrs. Hatton reached Elko by the Morning Express just a week ago to-day."

"A week ago—"

It was all the colonel could say.

He resumed his seat, literally gasping for breath.

"At Elko, a week ago, and her present whereabouts a mystery! That is indeed a grave situation, colonel," pursued Detective Morgan, as he sat down, facing his friend and employer. "But it is a situation to which I have some clues, and I hope to soon clear it up, sir."

"Go on," commanded the colonel.

"That the lady reached Elko safely, on the morning named, has been perfectly established," proceeded the detective. "Mr. Green, one of the proprietors of the Depot Hotel, says he distinctly remembers her. She not only took breakfast at his place, but he answered various questions she asked him, and even noticed her name on a hand-bag she had with her. He remembers, too, that the burden of her questions was in regard to reaching this camp. He even recalls that he recommended her to take the regular stage from Elko to Huntington, which she did, Mr. Green himself placing her in it and charging the driver, Cal Stevens, to see that she was duly furnished with conveyance from Huntington to this camp!"

The colonel bowed gratefully for the information thus furnished, but did not speak.

He was studying and weighing the facts presented, thus endeavoring to get all their bearings and meanings.

"Go on," he at length repeated.

"I now come to the sinister side of the business," pursued Morgan. "I have discovered that Mrs. Hatton and Cal Stevens both disappeared between Elko and Huntington, and probably not far from the Toll-gate. At any rate, the horses were noticed at the latter point to have no driver, and the stage no passengers."

The colonel groaned.

"As to just what had happened," declared the detective, "I cannot form any satisfactory conjecture. The lines had been secured to the trake in such a way as to prevent them from getting under foot, and not a soul along the road had remarked any stoppage, shooting, violence, or anything else unusual. Everything was as much in order as if the driver had got down and opened the door, and Mrs. Hatton had alighted and walked away!"

"And no one has since seen my wife or the driver?" asked Colonel Hatton, with a voice which betrayed his unutterable anguish.

"Not a soul, sir! I have called at every house between the Toll-gate and Sheppard's, and have spoken to almost every person I have encountered, but no one has seen any trace of Mrs. Hatton and the driver. I have talked with a man who saw the stage at the entrance of the Bradley Forest, and he says that the driver was then in his seat, and that the lady appeared to be dozing in a corner of the interior, but I cannot find that any one ever saw them emerge from the forest. If you are familiar with the place, you will remember that there are several lonely spots thereabouts, especially among the spurs and foot-hills which project from the Diamond Range, and it would not have been difficult for a few ruffians, more or less, to have held up the stage in those solitudes."

Colonel Hatton moved uneasily, thrusting his fingers nervously through his hair.

"What sort of a man is this Cal Stevens?" he demanded.

"An honest, good-natured fellow, who is a first class driver," answered Morgan. "Everybody along the road knows him, as may well be the case, considering how many years he has been going up and down it, but I have not been able to find a single person who speaks ill of Cal—not one. Everybody agrees that no suspicion of wrong-doing can possibly be attached to Cal Stevens."

"I am glad to hear it," declared the colonel, with a sigh of relief. "But how do you explain his silence—his absence?"

"I can only suppose that he was killed in defending Mrs. Hatton from some assailant, or that he has been carried off into the hills with her, as a prisoner. But, I really have no more reason to adopt one of these theories than the other. Nevertheless, I have a small army scouring the forest and vicinity at this moment, and I hope to soon hear something decisive from that quarter."

The colonel turned to Bert, for the first time since the arrival of the detective, and asked:

"What's your opinion, Bert, after hearing the report of Morgan?"

"Simply, colonel, that everything points to the abduction of Mrs. Hatton by Bishop Ruddle."

"That's my view, to the exclusion of all other theories," avowed Colonel Hatton, "and I even begin to comprehend how the bishop got the information upon which he has acted. My wife doubtless sent me the programme of her coming, and that letter, through the perfidy of that villainous postmaster, has fallen into the hands of Daggett."

"I agree with you perfectly, colonel," declared Bert, seeing that the glances of his chief were demanding an answer. "If Mrs. Hatton had been seized for a ransom, her captors would have been heard from some days since."

"But all this is Greek to you, Morgan," said Colonel Hatton, turning to the detective. "Come into the house, and I'll give you a little more light on this subject."

CHAPTER VII.

BAD COMPLICATIONS.

COLONEL HATTON led the way into his elegantly furnished library, where refreshments were duly served by a housemaid, and the trio spent the next hour in a thorough discussion of the situation.

The conclusion to which they came, and in which they were unanimous, was that Mrs. Hatton had been intercepted by Bishop Ruddle, or by some one acting for him.

"This renewed attempt to capture," remarked the colonel, in conclusion, "has a double significance. Both Mrs. Hatton and myself are the objects of a well-defined machination, although I cannot yet see its exact nature."

"And why may not your daughter also be included in the schemes of the conspirators?" asked the detective. "Since you and Mrs. Hatton are so closely beset by these 'Avengers,' 'Sons of Thunder'—or whatever they may call themselves—is it not probable that they will seek to entrap Miss Effie on her arrival here?"

The anxious husband and father started as if a deadly serpent had bitten him.

Some apprehensions of the sort had been for several days taking shape in his mind, but they now suddenly took new form, under the facts which had come to his knowledge, and acquired new strength from the conclusions to which he had just come.

"Did she not write that she would be here about this time?" added Morgan.

"She did," answered the colonel, "but she

promised to write again before starting, and to state first what day she would be here."

"And that promised letter has not reached you, colonel?"

"Not yet—no, sir."

"May I ask why she did not come with her mother?"

"For the reason that she was visiting a school-girl friend in Albany, several hundred miles away, when my wife suddenly decided to join me. This decision was taken because of a line or two in one of the letters Mr. Tabor wrote at my dictation. We cannot recall just what it was, but it doubtless implied that my condition was critical—as indeed it was, at that date."

"All natural enough, but all as bad as it can be," commented the detective thoughtfully. "Ten to one, Miss Effie is included in the bishop's machinations."

"In any case, I will telegraph if I do not get a letter from her in to-morrow's mail," announced the colonel. "It would be simply horrible if she were to fall into some such trap as has evidently been set for her mother."

The detective arose with a keen air of business and resumed:

"Well, you agree, colonel, that I had better give my attention to the bishop and his surroundings during the next twenty-four hours?"

"Yes, Morgan; that's evidently the central point of the situation," returned the colonel. "Do you want a companion or assistant?"

"Not this trip—no, sir. When I do, I will ask for Mr. Tabor."

"Of course you comprehend the dangerous character of the crowd you are going into," pursued the colonel, as he also arose. "Don't forget for a moment that you are taking your life into your hands! Keep a sharp lookout for 'Captain Lightning' as for Daggett himself. They'd murder you in a moment if you should arouse their suspicions and place yourself in their power."

"Oh, I'll be careful," assured Morgan, smilingly, offering his hand. "Expect me before noon to-morrow, and do not despair until hope is no longer possible."

As he rode away briskly upon a fresh horse placed at his disposal the eyes of Colonel Hatton moistened with deep feeling.

"It's fortunate that I have two such friends as you and Morgan at this moment, Bert," he declared. "Were it not for the hope and assistance I receive from you and Hardy, my anguish would be too great to be borne. My poor wife! Where can she be at this moment? And Effie! Is she already near us? Shall I have a letter in the morning?"

"We must hope for the best, as I have so often told you," returned Bert. "And now to speak of a matter which I have begun to lay greatly to heart—your safety. After this new attack, I feel that it is not safe for you to remain here over-night with no other protection than that I am able to offer."

"Not safe? What do you fear?"

"Why, that Captain Lightning or some of his ruffians may come here during the night and abduct you!"

"Well, what would you suggest?"

"To begin with, I propose to rig a bell on the house, so that I can call all the miners from the camp to our assistance at a moment's warning."

"The suggestion is a good one," commented the colonel, "as your suggestions always are. What else do you advise?"

"Well, in the second place, we will not await a visit here, but will take refuge in the camp soon after dark. At least you must take this course and I will remain here alone."

The colonel looked as pained as thoughtful at this suggestion, so keenly did it bring home to him the trouble which had fallen upon him and the peril in which he was living.

But he could not deny the prudence and wisdom Bert was showing in this matter as in so many others.

"I will heed your suggestion, of course," he declared. "I am so nearly recovered from that shot-wound of six weeks ago that I do not expect any further complications, but I ought to avoid all fighting and violence for the present, and to spare myself as much as possible all worry and excitement. I will spend the night with James Henry in his tent."

Bert drew a sigh of relief, expressing his pleasure at this arrangement, which certainly took a great load of anxiety from his mind.

"If you can spare me for an hour, colonel," he added, "I will now give my attention to hanging that bell."

"Very well, Bert. I will avail myself of this chance of taking a nap. I was never more tired than I am now, with the work and worry of the last forty-eight hours, and can hardly keep my eyes open. Besides, it will be well, as matters stand, to lay up as much strength as possible against the eventualities which are sure to come."

Bert withdrew, and the colonel laid off his coat and vest, and took possession of a favorite lounge, drawing a light blanket around him.

In less than a minute he was sound asleep. He was awakened several hours later by a

slight touch from Bert, and found that the night had fully set in.

"What is it, Bert?" he asked, gaining his feet quickly, as he noted by the lamp which had been lighted the anxious expression of his young friend's features.

"I am sorry to disturb you, colonel," he said, in a low, hurried tone, "but the sheriff of the county, with two deputies, is in the reception-room, and urgently demanding to see you."

"The sheriff! What does he want?"

"He has come to arrest us, sir!"

"Arrest us? For what?"

"For several assaults and batteries, complicated with attempts at murder. The complaint appears to be founded upon what took place this afternoon on the shore of Franklin Lake. Those Mormon cut-throats have had the cheek to go before the authorities and make oath that we are the aggressors."

The colonel looked incredulous.

"Oh, the sheriff has shown me his warrants for us, or I would not have awakened you," pursued Bert. "And he has been so kind and considerate," he added, with scornful bitterness, "as to bring a two-horse carriage with which to cart us to jail."

"To jail?" echoed Colonel Hatton. "At such a moment! With my wife at the mercy of some horrible ruffian, and my daughter in danger of falling into like hands! The infernal—"

The colonel finished with a gesture of unutterable disgust and indignation.

For once language had failed to do justice to his feelings.

But, suddenly, he started as if a dagger had traversed his vitals.

"The sheriff!" he repeated, with a startled air. "The sheriff lives in Elko, fifty miles away. How can he have got here so soon to serve warrants for something that happened late this afternoon? The thing's simply impossible! These pretended officers are frauds! They're ruffians who have been sent here by Daggett to murder us!"

CHAPTER VIII.

"BIRDS OF A FEATHER."

How such a state of things had come about?

The explanation is soon given.

As Bishop Ruddle, otherwise Daggett, was going home from Franklin Lake, accompanied by his daughter, Mee-an-kah and the Indian girl, and driven by Captain Lightning, he suddenly found himself intercepted by three men who held up their hands and otherwise signified that they wished to have speech with him.

"If you please, old pard!" said, in a very suggestive, impressive voice, the most prominent of these three very peculiar, picturesque, but repulsive persons.

Bishop Ruddle's first sentiment was to be annoyed and angry at these appeals.

He pursed up his lips, and threw his head back, with the air of a man who has only scorn and contempt for his fellows.

In this spirit he was encouraged by his daughter, who glanced crushingly at the three men, while her full, red lips gave utterance to the following remark, which was accompanied by a toss of the head:

"The horrible creatures!"

But a second glance wrought a notable change in the bishop's manner.

He had evidently seen, under widely different circumstances, at least one of these picturesque ruffians before.

He "came down from his high horse," as the saying is. His under jaw fell as if he had seen an apparition or a ghost, or anything else that is oppressively disagreeable.

"Hold on, Jerry," he said to his driver.

With a slow, dull sort of a smile, which a keen observer would have pronounced equivocal, "Jerry" drew rein promptly, and the carriage came to a halt in such a way that the bishop found himself immediately close beside the baleful eyes of the individual whose few words had so deeply moved him.

"You here!" was the bishop's greeting, as his ruddy face paled perceptibly.

"As you see, old pard!"

The bishop's eyes scanned the faces and figures before him in one swift and comprehensive sweep, taking in their wild and haggard aspects, their unkempt hair and beards, their gaunt and wasted forms, their ragged and dirty garments, and the general air of distress and desperation which was to be seen in their every aspect and action.

Then the hand of the pretentious parvenu went down into his well-filled pocket, and he brought out several pieces of gold which he offered to the specter of distress which had so unexpectedly swooped down upon him.

"It's not the want of money alone, old pard," said the spokesman of the three tattered demagogues, in a quiet, but intensely significant and insinuating voice. "I must exchange a few words with you—now and here. Suppose you step aside a moment with me, so that what I have to say will remain our own secret?"

"Certainly—certainly," answered the bishop, with simulated alacrity. "It's part of my religion, as you must well know, to minister to the needy and suffering."

While speaking, the bishop had slipped from the carriage with nervous celerity, and he led the way rapidly toward the dense group of bushes to which the glances of the stalwart vagabond had invited him, the two disappearing promptly from the view of Millsie, the young Indian girl, and the coachman, as also from the view of the two waiting strangers.

As to Mee-an-kah, it will be remembered that he was asleep.

"Well, what is it, Horrucks?" asked the bishop, as soon as he found himself alone with his strange acquaintance. "Be as brief as you can."

"My situation is desperate, Norman," said Horrucks, complying with the request for brevity. "You're familiar with that affair of the Bank o' Nevada?"

"Ah—yes."

The bishop's response spoke volumes.

"Well, I didn't get a cent, and we've been fugitives ever since, with five thousand on our heads! The last turn has been taken—we're at the end of our rope! The sheriff and his deputies have hunted us into this neighborhood and are closing in upon us! We not only want money, therefore, lots of money—all the money you can give us—but we want good horses, clothes, food, ammunition and other supplies—in a word, Norman, such assistance as will enable us to make this night a big and final break for Utah, and to be sixty miles from here by daylight to-morrow morning!"

The bishop extended his hand, grasping that of the burly ruffian before him.

His thoughts had moved like lightning.

"All this I will do, Horrucks, in memory of the old days," he assured. "But I will do it in my own way, and you must do something in return for me!"

"Anything and everything, old pard!" exclaimed Horrucks, with genuine gratitude for the aid promised, and with an air of indescribable relief. "You've only to speak, Norman. What can I do for you?"

The bishop peered out of the bushes into the road to assure himself that all was right there, and then turned back to his friend of other days.

"You know where the Gentile camp is?" he asked, lowering his voice to a whisper.

"Well, I ought to, as we have been hidden near it for two days past, living on such refuse as is cast out from it!"

"Then you may know where the new house of Colonel Hatton is?"

"I tried in vain to get into it last night to get something to eat, old pard. But I never saw a house so metically closed! Like the shell of an oyster! The colonel and his people are evidently on the lookout for intruders!"

The bishop smiled grimly.

"His watchfulness will not save him," he said, "since fate or luck—whatever we may call it—has brought us together again, Horrucks! As I know you of old, I needn't beat about the bush, but will tell you in a few words what you are to do for me, and what I will do for you in return!"

"That's jest what I'm waiting to hear, an' we can't talk too fast! That sheriff may be near us!"

"Then listen," and Daggett sunk his voice still lower. "I have to get rid of that Colonel Hatton, and, as you know by experience, the best way to get rid of an enemy is to kill him!"

Horrucks did not protest. He did not even start at the proposition.

"How is it to be done?" he asked.

"You are to go there as Sheriff Atwell, taking your two pals with you as deputies. You will be supplied with warrants for his arrest—which I will furnish. If you can kill him quietly in his house, so much the better. If possible, you are to also kill a young man named Bert Tabor, who is almost constantly in the colonel's company, and who acts of late as his representative, especially since the colonel has been laid up with a rifle-bullet."

"But how are we to get there?" demanded Horrucks.

"I will send you in a carriage, furnishing you with a driver in whom you can have perfect confidence, as I have. If you kill the colonel at his house, you will quietly ride away in the carriage, and doubtless get a good start before any alarm is raised behind you. Should the colonel and young Tabor have too many people around them to admit of killing them at the house, you'll take them away with you, as your prisoners, and leave the rest with your driver, who will have his instructions."

"Of what sort, Norman?"

"Why, he'll drive you to the rendezvous where I shall be in waiting, with a thousand dollars for each of you, three good horses, new suits of clothes, and all necessary linen, with shaving materials, so that you can get yourselves up into such shape as to pass muster anywhere!"

"Good!" muttered Horrucks, as a gleam of hope appeared on his haggard face and in his wild eyes. "It's a bargain! But we can't go near the colonel until after dark, and in the meantime—"

"In the mean time, you will remain just

where you are, since there is no better hiding-place to be had. Here is a revolver for you," and the bishop handed over his favorite weapon, "and my driver has a couple on his person which I will hand to your companions. Thus armed, you'll be able to sell your lives dearly, if the sheriff discovers your retreat. But, what am I saying? You and your friends, thus armed, are a battalion by yourselves. If the sheriff and his posse intrude, you can kill every man of them!"

"We can and will!" returned Horrucks, with a ferocious gleam in his eyes. "But tell us what else we've to do?"

"Why, you are simply to remain concealed here until my driver—not this man, but another—appears here with the carriage. That will be two or three hours hence, or just as it begins to get dark. I will send plenty to eat and drink by the driver, and also hats and other things to make you a little more like what you will represent yourselves to be at the colonel's. You see how simple and easy it all is. First, you stay here till the carriage comes. Second, you eat and go to the colonel's, killing him there or circumstances. Third, and last, you are driven from the colonel's to a spot where I shall be waiting with three of my best horses, three thousand dollars, and everything you require to take you safely over the line into your old wallows!"

Horrucks was more than willing to take his part in these proceedings.

He was even eager and impatient.

"Good-by, then," added the bishop, again wringing the hand of his old acquaintance. "I'll give your friends the revolvers and send them to you, and you can explain matters to them at your leisure. I will depend upon you, Horrucks, even as you can depend upon me to do all I have promised. Good-by and good luck!"

Such was the plot under which the three pretended officers had appeared at the colonel's. Let us see how it worked.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SHEARERS SHORN.

THE declaration of Colonel Hatton, that the three men were impostors and intended assassins, proved a bright pointer for Bert Tabor.

He recoiled a step or two, raising his hands excitedly in a gesture of comprehension.

"By Jove!" he breathed, making use of the exclamation with which he usually seasoned his astonishment, "you're right, colonel. What you say throws a new light upon sundry sayings and doings of these men. Their carriage is not to take us to jail, but to enable them to make their escape after they've killed us."

"Nevertheless, we'll put a flea in their ears," said Colonel Hatton. "Go and tell them that it will be half an hour before I can see them, as I will not return from the camp inside of that time. Ask them to make themselves comfortable and offer refreshments. If they accept, I'll brew them a punch!"

Bert comprehended.

He returned to the visitors.

Having had a lively sense of his danger for several months preceding, the colonel had taken the precaution to insert several secret panels in the walls of his commodious apartments, including a couple in the reception-room, and he now hastened to make use of these facilities for inspecting the visitors without being seen by them.

At the first glance he bestowed upon them, he saw that his theory of their character must necessarily be correct, for they were as tough-looking as any trio of men he had ever encountered.

The one in the foreground, and who had announced himself as the sheriff, was especially ignoble and repulsive.

All seemed as ready for violence as so many tigers crouching in their lair.

Their hands strayed nervously in the direction of their pistol-pockets, and they kept changing their positions, as if seeking to obtain every possible advantage in the work which was written in their every glance and movement, as well as in their ill-clad forms and vicious features.

All three of them arose, with their hands on their revolvers, at the return of Bert, and their glances literally devoured him.

In a tone so quiet and careless, as well as polite, as to utterly exclude any suspicion that he was playing a part, Bert proceeded to acquit himself of the commission with which he had been charged.

"Absent? Half-hour afore he shows up?" muttered the pretended sheriff. "Make 'self 'greeable? Refreshments? Certainly, my handsome young pard. We're in no hurry. No necessity of apologies," and the speaker resumed his seat. "We're all right here and no objection to waiting."

Bert inclined himself politely and retired.

As the door closed between him and the visitors, the pretended sheriff—who was no other than Horrucks—applied his thumb to his nose and gyrated the accompanying fingers in a manner that was decidedly significant.

Waiting only long enough to witness this tell-tale ebullition of jubilation, the colonel closed the secret panel and returned to Bert.

"Remain here and watch them," whispered the colonel. "I'll soon return."

Bert nodded understandingly, and the colonel took a flask from his desk and proceeded to the kitchen.

Here sat Nora Norden, the housemaid, who was also acting as cook and housekeeper, pending the expected arrivals from the East.

She was so capable, thoughtful, and devoted, and always looked so neat and pleasant, that the colonel prized her highly, and treated her as a friend rather than as a servant.

She was scarcely eighteen, being of the same age as the stable-boy, who was her twin brother, and the only relative she had living.

Both had been in the employ of the colonel three years, or almost from the date of their arrival in America, and they had both learned to regard him and his wife and daughter with an affection amounting to reverence.

"Have you any hot water, Nora?" queried Colonel Hatton, as the girl arose attentively.

"A kettle full, sir, which is almost upon a boil," was the answer, as Nora hastened to replenish the stove with fuel.

Helping himself to a large pitcher, the colonel proceeded to mix his ingredients for the promised punch, adding the water as soon as it had come to a boil, and then filling a small pitcher from the large one, and placing the former on a corner of the stove.

"This is for Bert," he said to Nora. "Do not let any one else touch it."

Nora bowed assent and the colonel placed the punch upon a large tray, with half a dozen tumblers, and returned to Bert.

"Get them to drink freely of this, Bert," he enjoined, handing him the tray, "and then take the driver to the kitchen and treat him to the small pitcher of punch you will find on the stove."

Bert departed on these errands, and was successful in every particular with the pretended officers, who praised the punch and drank freely, and then he paid his attentions in a similar way to the driver, whom he invited to the kitchen.

Remaining with the driver only long enough to feel certain of securing him, Bert beckoned Nora from the room, giving her a hint of what was coming, so that she need not be alarmed, and then returned to the reception-room.

"The colonel will be here inside of ten minutes, Mr. Sheriff," he announced, with the same quiet politeness of which he had before made use.

"Glad to hear it," was the answer of Horrucks. "The boys were just saying—"

The voice of the speaker died away strangely in his throat.

He made one or two efforts to finish the sentence, but his utterance rapidly became thick and incoherent.

"I was saying this politeness s'picious," explained one of the pretended deputies, "and that the colonel—might give us—slip—"

"Oh, the colonel is not that sort of a man," assured Bert, as the head of the pretended sheriff sunk heavily upon the table beside which he was seated. "He'll be here within a few minutes, as promised."

"Great Scott! how my head feels!" exclaimed the third ruffian. "See here, young man! you've been dosing us! My head spins like a top! Eternal blazes! I—"

He made an effort to draw his revolver, at the same time sputtering incoherently.

Bert watched him as a cat watches a mouse, ready to take prompt action with him if necessary, but the drug was rapid in its action, and in a few moments more he tumbled into a heap upon the floor.

A glance told Bert that the other two were also completely unconscious and helpless.

"The driver is already in the same fix," announced Colonel Hatton, as he came quietly into the reception-room, followed by the wondering housemaid and her brother. "We may as well get them all out upon the lawn."

The transfer was quickly effected by Bert and young Norden, who placed the unconscious men side by side near the entrance, with their backs against the slope of a terrace.

"Keep an eye on them, Jonas," ordered Colonel Hatton to the stable-boy. "Of course they are going to prison as soon as we can execute the necessary formalities. They can be held for personating officers, if upon no other charge."

"Shall we disarm them, sir?" asked Bert.

"That can be done by the officials to whom we consign them. It will be enough for the present to put the bracelets upon them."

He stepped into his library, from which he returned with a supply of handcuffs large enough to meet all the requirements of the occasion.

"The job has been well managed," he added, as he proceeded to snap the "bracelets" into place, with a long sigh of relief. "It will be at least six or eight hours before they'll recover their senses."

"I think we ought to go through their pockets, sir," suggested Bert. "We may find a clew to their identity, and possibly documents that will criminate them."

"Quite right, Bert," returned the colonel. "Bring a lantern, Nora."

The housemaid was prompt to comply, and the pockets of the culprits were turned out with due deliberation and thoroughness, Bert doing the searching and the colonel holding the lantern.

For a time nothing was found save tobacco, pipes, combs, revolvers and flasks of whisky, but at last Bert came upon a yellow folio poster, neatly folded, in the pocketbook of the pretended sheriff, which gave him a start of eager expectancy.

"Just hear this!" he cried, after unfolding the poster and running his glances over it rapidly. "Here's their pedigree."

And he read aloud as follows:

"FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS REWARD! This sum will be paid for such evidence as will lead to the arrest and conviction of three men, whose description is appended, who made an attempt to rob the State National Bank of Nevada, on the afternoon of the 10th of May last, shooting and dangerously wounding Assistant-Cashier Hoffman. Said men are supposed to have come from Utah, and it is thought that they will make an attempt to return hither. Write or wire to

"T. E. ATWELL,
"Sheriff of Elko County."

CHAPTER X.

THE REAL SHERIFF AND HIS COUNTERFEIT.

THE reading of this document was followed by a general expression of joy and satisfaction.

"These are the men wanted," declared Colonel Hatton, with suppressed jubilation. "The descriptions fit them as well as could be expected, seeing how short was their stay at the bank, and the excitement of those who saw them. Nothing is more common than for criminals of this sort to carry along such evidence with them, either from pride or bravado, and the presence of the sheriff's name in the poster is a sufficient explanation of the use they are now making of it."

"But how about their undertaking to come here to kill us?" asked Bert.

"That's easily explained," answered the colonel. "As they did not get any money at the bank, and have since been hunted like wolves, they have doubtless had the hardest of times, going hungry and ragged, and hiding in all sorts of out-of-the-way places, and taking all this time to get as far east as here. While in this desperate situation they have fallen into the hands of 'Captain Lightning,' or some similar tool of Daggett's, who has bribed them to murder us."

There was no need to speculate further.

That this state of affairs really existed, or some similar condition of things, was a natural and imperative deduction from the facts already known.

"Well, nothing could be better," declared Bert, as he handed the poster to the colonel, after returning the other effects of the ruffians to their pockets. "By coming here to shear us, they're in a fair way to be shorn!"

"Not only that," returned Colonel Hatton, with a long breath of relief, "but we are in a fair way to learn who hired these men, and all the other particulars. By the time they have been shut up a few weeks they'll be ripe for confession."

He reflected a few moments intently, and added:

"Of course we must hasten to the nearest telegraph-office, and wire Sheriff Atwell to come here and get them."

As the colonel was speaking, a clatter of hoofs was heard on the road, and a horseman was seen approaching at a furious gallop, lighting his way with a lantern.

"Ah! what is that?" cried the colonel. "Look sharp, Bert and Jonas! We must not be caught napping!"

Reaching the gate leading into the colonel's grounds, the horseman threw himself from his horse, and examined the tracks which had been left by the carriage of the pretended officers.

Then he waved his lantern excitedly, evidently as a signal, and swung himself back into the saddle, beginning his progress toward the house, and holding his lantern up in front of him, so that his face and person could be seen.

"Why, it's Morgan!" cried Bert.

At the same instant, another and louder clatter of hoofs resounded, and half a dozen horsemen were heard dashing along the road, as if following the detective and guided by him.

In a few moments more, Morgan came to a halt abruptly in front of the colonel and his party, and leaped lightly to the ground.

"Have you seen the rascals?" he demanded breathlessly, as he flashed the rays of his lantern upon the trail left by the carriage of the three outlaws, as it was taken around to the rear of the house.

"Seen whom?" answered the colonel.

"Three men in a carriage, with a driver on the box," replied the detective. "They're the famous robbers of the State National Bank of Nevada. A reward of five thousand dollars has been offered for their capture. The sheriff and a number of deputies have been pressing them for weeks and have finally corralled them in the Ruby Valley. Ah!"

Grand tableau.

The searching eyes of the mountain detective had encountered the four silent figures backed against the terrace, just as the half-dozen horsemen came thundering up the drive toward the house.

"Why, here they are now!" he added, as he flashed his light over the unconscious prisoners. "Had a battle? Have you killed them?"

"No, Hardy," replied Colonel Hatton. "We've merely treated them to a medicated punch."

"Drugged only?"

"That's all."

The detective swung his lantern aloft with cries of the wildest rejoicing.

"Here they are, Sheriff Atwell," he called to the foremost horseman, who had hastily dismounted, while the others ranged themselves in readiness to execute any order that might be given them. "My friend, Colonel Hatton, to whom I am very glad to introduce you, has had the good fortune to capture them, although I am still ignorant of the motives which have influenced him in the matter."

"This is the real Sheriff Atwell, then?" cried the colonel, shaking hands heartily with the new-comer. "It is a pleasure to make your personal acquaintance."

"A compliment you will please consider fully reciprocated, colonel," responded the sheriff. "I know you well by reputation as the chief of the Gentile camp, as we generally call it, to distinguish it from the other, and it is needless to add that no man in Elko is better aware of your high character and honorable standing than your humble servant. But you spoke of me as the real Atwell, colonel? What does that imply? That there is a false or bogus Atwell in the neighborhood?"

"That's just what I mean, Mr. Sheriff," replied the colonel smilingly, as he flashed the rays of his lantern over the face and form of the principal prisoner. "And here he is."

"Ah! Bullion Red!" exclaimed the sheriff. "I'm glad to see him!"

"You know him, then?"

"Yes, colonel. He's one of the most daring highwaymen we've ever had in Nevada! I thought the leader in that bank affair would turn out to be Bullion Red. It was quite in his style, you see! But what was he doing under my name, colonel?"

"He pretended to have a warrant for my arrest, and that of my young friend here—"

"A warrant? That gallows-bird! Let me see it, please!"

The documents were produced, and the sheriff gave them a brief examination.

"Fraudulent, of course," he commented. "But what was the rascal driving at?"

"I have reason to think that he and his pals intended to kill me and my young friend at sight," declared Hatton. "But thereby hangs a tale. Will you come in a little while and have some refreshments?"

"This chap is safe here, is he not?" queried the sheriff, touching the motionless figure of Bullion Red with his foot.

"Oh, yes. They'll all sleep till morning!"

"Good! I'll come in with pleasure!"

CHAPTER XI.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

BECKONING Morgan to enter, the colonel led the way into the house, conducting his guests to the library, leaving Bert and Jonas as a guard over the prisoners, while the sheriff's posse remained in line to await orders.

The three gentlemen were soon seated around a small table, with a bottle of choice wine and other refreshments between them.

T. E. Atwell, the sheriff of Elko County, Nevada, is a middle-aged man, of compact, active figure, with a regard which is at once keen and kindly, and a man about whom there is no sort of nonsense.

"How came you to encounter Morgan, sheriff?" asked the colonel, as he filled the glasses of his guests.

"We met him on the road between the two lakes," replied Atwell. "We had run our three robbers into the solitudes thereof, as we believed, but when we closed in upon them, or rather upon the spot where they should have been, they were *non est*. It was Morgan who put us on their track. He had just met a carriage going west, with three occupants and a driver, and it was only natural to suspect that the said carriage contained the three men we have been so long seeking. He was so good as to offer to assist us in running them down, and here we are."

"Ah, I see," returned the colonel. "As the case has turned out you could not have been better guided. But how came the villains by that carriage and the horses?"

"Either they stole the rig, or it was loaned or given them by some confederate," replied Atwell, thoughtfully. "Let's go and take a look at it."

Acting upon this proposition, the three gentlemen proceeded to give the carriage and horses their best attention.

But nothing could be gleaned from them.

"All I can say is that it looks like a rig I saw

Bishop Ruddle using to-day," declared the colonel. "Unfortunately, there is no point by which I can identify it. But let's take a look at the driver."

The driver was duly passed in review, as he lay beside his unconscious companions upon the lawn, but the investigation proved wholly sterile.

No one had ever seen the fellow before, or had the least clew to his identity.

"Of course he's not necessarily a pal of the robbers," said the colonel, as he led the way back to the library. "He may be some resident of the valley who has no knowledge of the character of the fugitives. They may have hired him for five or ten dollars to bring them here. This question can be best discussed when the prisoners have recovered their senses in the morning. It would only be natural, however, for the robbers, when they found themselves in danger of capture, to make just such an attempt as this to get out of the way."

"Very true, colonel," said the detective, who had received from Bert a brief statement of the situation before entering the house, "but that isn't quite all there is of it. The robbers, in coming here, to kill you or carry you off, were evidently carrying out some contract they had undertaken, rather than making their escape."

"The point is well taken," declared the colonel, as the trio resumed their seats. "And the robbers having undertaken to kill me or capture me, it is quite in order to ask upon whose account they were acting. Evidently not upon their own, since they cannot know me from Adam, and cannot possibly have had any ill-will against me."

"To this inquiry there can be only one response," decided Morgan. "These men, in coming here, were acting for Bishop Ruddle."

"And such being the case," pursued Colonel Hatton, "we must necessarily conclude that they were doing this work as a return for some great good the bishop had promised to do for them. Now, what did he promise them?"

"What could he promise men in such a fix as they were in?" returned the detective. "The one great point they wished to compass was to escape from their pursuers and get the supplies they needed."

"But they haven't a dollar on their persons," declared Colonel Hatton.

"That proves merely that the bishop was wise enough to arrange to pay them after the work was done."

"Then he must have arranged to meet them somewhere in the course of the night. The grand difficulty is to say *where*."

"But all this is a puzzle to you, sheriff," said Colonel Hatton, turning to Atwell, "and I must ask you to remain here long enough for me to tell you of the very disagreeable situation in which I am placed."

"As long as you please, colonel," returned Atwell heartily. "After the splendid work you have accomplished in the capture of these men, I am ready to sit here a week if I can be of the least service to you."

Expressing his thanks for this assurance, the colonel proceeded to set forth, in a few rapid sentences, the facts concerning his wife, and to relate what had really taken place that afternoon on the shore of Franklin Lake between him and Bert on the one hand and the minions of the bishop on the other.

"Ah, the light begins to dawn upon me!" was Atwell's comment, after he had expressed his earnest sympathy. "That fraud of a bishop is evidently the hinge upon which turn all these proceedings. This is not the first trouble you've had, I believe, with the occupants of the rival camp?"

"Certainly not, sir," replied the colonel. "They nearly killed me six weeks ago, in an attempt to capture me, giving me a wound through the body from which I never expect to fully recover."

"The miscreants! Why is it that I have not heard of that matter? Didn't you have the parties arrested?"

"No, Mr. Sheriff. I've never entertained for a moment the thought of making a complaint for the simple reason that no good could have come of it. It would be a simple impossibility for me to identify the man who fired the bullet, and even such an identification would be met by any amount of false swearing to the contrary."

"Those Mormons are going to make us trouble, sooner or later," remarked the sheriff, thoughtfully. "There can be no doubt that they are crowding in upon us systematically, with the intention of getting political power. Of course there are good men among the Mormons, as in all other sects, but there is also a large class, like this Daggett or Ruddle, who have become Mormons for the sake of what they can gain by the step. But to come back to Bullion Red. You are aware that a reward has been offered for his capture—a number of rewards, in fact, which aggregate more than five thousand dollars, and to this sum you will of course be entitled."

Colonel Hatton shook his head.

"You may put down Albert Tabor as the captor," he said. "Bert actually had the fellows at

his mercy before I entered their presence. The money will be of some consequence to him, as his claim can scarcely be said to be paying him, and he is really entitled to it for the risk he assumed and the nerve he displayed. You will please, therefore, report him as the captor."

"All right, colonel; it shall be done."

The sheriff wrote the name carefully in a small diary, which he restored to his pocket.

"And now, to settle upon the business of the night, for business there is," he said, with the decided, wide-awake air of a man who knows how to utilize a first or partial success. "If we leave the prisoners here in your care, with young Tabor and your servants to assist you, they will be quite safe, I suppose, colonel?"

"Perfectly so—perfectly."

"Then here's our plan, sir," proposed Sheriff Atwell, thoughtfully. "While you remain here, colonel, with the prisoners, Mr. Morgan and I will take possession of the mysterious rig, with one of my deputies on the box as driver, and another beside us, with the rest following on horseback a hundred yards behind us, and we'll drive forth in quest of information."

"A capital idea!" returned Colonel Hatton.

"I don't exactly suppose that we shall find the spot where Bishop Ruddle awaits his allies," added the sheriff as he arose. "And yet I might."

"In any case, the experiment is worth trying," said Morgan. "At the least, colonel, the sheriff can deposit me near the scene of labor for which I was bound when he met me, namely, the bishop's residence."

"So be it," said the colonel, as he also gained his feet. "Since we all agree that there is a point of contact between these men and the bishop, we can do no less than try to find out what it is."

The carriage and horses were quickly brought around to the front of the house, and Atwell selected his driver and companion, giving the balance of his *posse* their instructions.

Then all took their places and the carriage rolled quietly away.

"Of course you'll *live* those men safely in the house as soon as we are gone, colonel?" suggested Atwell, as he waved his hand by way of adieu.

"Of course, sir," was the answer.

For a few moments the colonel and his party stood absorbed and attentive, as the carriage rolled down the drive and out of the gate, followed at a distance by the four mounted deputies.

So absorbed that they did not notice "Captain Lightning" and Bishop Ruddle, who peered around the corner of the house, taking careful note of the situation!

And so absorbed, too, that they did not notice the movements of the two intruders, as they slipped noiselessly around to the rear entrance, and boldly invaded the colonel's dwelling!

Clearly enough, the bishop was getting deeply interested in the schemes upon which he had entered, and even was more daring, active, and dangerous than his antagonists imagined.

CHAPTER XII.

A FOX IN THE TRAP.

THE prisoners were conveyed to the reception-room in due course, and Bert and Jonas, with the aid of Nora, closed the house for the night.

"Have you got that bell hung, Bert?" then asked Colonel Hatton, as the young man joined him in the reception-room.

"Long ago, sir."

"So that we can alarm the camp at any desired moment?"

"Yes, sir. I've arranged with James Henry and the rest to come here at the least sound from that bell in such numbers as to carry all before them."

"Good. The existence of that bell is at once a safeguard and a comfort."

A brief silence succeeded, which was broken by a groan from the colonel.

"Of course my thoughts *will* keep coming back to the terrible problems presented by my wife's disappearance," he explained, as he led the way into his library, and threw himself upon the lounge from which he had been summoned to meet his visitors. "But I still hope, and will continue to hope, that she will soon be with us. How do you feel, Bert, after all these adventures?"

"As wakeful as ever, but tired," was the answer. "I was very busy during the long hours in which you slept so soundly. You see that cord at your right hand which seems to belong to the curtain?"

The colonel assented.

"Well, sir, that is one of the cords attached to the bell," explained Bert. "You have only to pull it sharply, if the enemy should intrude, to ring out a peal that will soon bring our comrades about us. Another similar cord comes into my room near the head of my bed. As to the bell itself, it is suspended in the tower."

"I am glad you have completed the arrangement," commented the colonel. "But we must give some attention to the bell and the cords daily, so as to be sure that they are always in working order. As you will now realize, Bert, we have entered upon a mortal struggle with the Mormon elements around us, and this

struggle can end only with the total defeat of one of the two contending forces. It is especially necessary that we be on our guard against spies and intruders. As we have seen fit to employ a detective, it is certain that the Mormons will soon follow our example."

"I agree with you, colonel, the war is raging, and one of the essentials of our success will be for you to keep as strong as possible. Ought you not to be getting to bed? It's late, you see."

"I shall have to wait awhile, after the long nap I've had," was the answer, "but the sooner all the rest of you are abed the better. You may say as much to Jonas and his sister. I shall need them both at an early hour of the morning, or as soon as our prisoners begin to recover their senses."

Bert communicated the colonel's wishes to the brother and sister, who were soon after heard going to their respective rooms in the upper part of the house.

Bert had been back scarcely a minute when the clatter of a tin pan was heard in the kitchen, as it fell from a shelf or table.

"Must be the cat," decided the colonel. "Better turn her out."

Bert took his way back to the kitchen, from which he soon returned again.

"It was the cat, sure enough," he reported. "But I've put her out."

"Then all is snug for the night, and you had better turn in. I will watch until I begin to get sleepy."

"Better let me have the first chance at it?" suggested Bert.

"No, no. I am aware how readily you get to sleep, and I shall not hesitate to ask you to replace me as soon as I've had enough of watching. Of course the prisoners are perfectly harmless and helpless. Even if they were awake they would be helpless, as all are handcuffed. Besides—"

He was interrupted by Bert, who raised a forefinger warningly.

"What is it?" he added.

"I thought I heard one of the prisoners make a movement!"

The colonel smiled indulgently.

"You are nervous, I see," he said. "Better get a good nap. That clatter of the tin pan has given you a start. Speaking of clatter, you may bring that bell from the dining-room table. We'll place it on a chair and attach every one of the prisoners to it, so that the bell will fall and give us warning if any one of them should make the least movement."

Bert was pleased with the suggestion, and it was quickly carried out.

"There! We're all right now," remarked the colonel. "I've a number of letters to write, and am anxious to get about it. Good-night, my dear Albert, and accept my best thanks for your affection and devotion."

The colonel offered his hand, and Bert responded to his kindly words, then taking his way up-stairs to his chamber.

Seating himself at his desk, the colonel entered upon the task to which he had alluded.

He had written but a few pages, however, when he became conscious of being annoyed and confused by the heavy breathing of the prisoners, and arose and closed the door between them and himself, with the intention of opening it as soon as he had finished his correspondence.

A minute or two thereafter, one of the prisoners—the driver—raised his head a few inches from the floor, without disturbing the rest of his body, and looked keenly around, listening. He had been "playing possum!"

Being naturally critical and suspicious, as well as keenly observant, he had noticed various circumstances and proceedings which had put him on his guard, and the mention of a half-hour's delay, with an invitation to enjoy a punch in the kitchen, was quite enough to inspire him with a well-defined conception of the drift of these attentions.

While pretending not to "tumble to it," therefore, he had shunned all danger as carefully as an old wolf shuns the pitfall or the trap!

Not a drop of the drugged punch had passed his lips! He had simply made, for Bert's benefit, a pretense of drinking. His purpose was to beat the conspirators at their own game!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RESCUE AND FLIGHT.

As the captive driver of the three unconscious outlaws raised his head, as related, in the reception-room of Colonel Hatton's house, he saw Bishop Ruddle standing in the passage leading to the kitchen, the doors of which had been left open by Bert on retiring, that he might the more readily hear any movement of the prisoners.

The light which had been left burning on the mantelpiece was quite bright enough for the bishop to see clearly the situation of Horrucks and his companions.

He had seen the movement of the driver, and stole nearer noiselessly, with an astonishment almost as great as his delight.

"What's the trouble, Shawgun?" he whispered.

"Caution!" was the response. "The colonel's in the next room. You see that bell on the chair in the center of this group? There's a string from that bell to my left knee. Try to find it without noise and clip it."

This was soon done.

"Now to take off these handcuffs!"

The second request was attended to as promptly as the first had been, the bishop carrying a bunch of keys which easily responded to the demand made upon him.

Gaining his feet noiselessly, Shawgun felt for his revolver, with eyes which blazed wrathfully.

"Drugged?" queried Ruddle, waving his hand over the three robbers.

"Yes. They are fixed for all night. No danger of their stirring, but I may as well put it out of their power to raise an alarm."

He felt for the other strings which had been attached to the bell and began removing them, resuming:

"Are you alone, bishop?"

"No. Jerry is with me—in the kitchen. I thought for a moment we were gone, when Jerry brushed that tin pan from the shelf, but fortunately it was laid to the cat!"

"How did you come?"

"With a carriage, which we have left just across the ravine, on the old trail. What's the colonel doing?"

"Writing letters. This snoring annoyed him, and he has closed the door for a few minutes."

"Where have Atwell and the rest gone?"

"To look for you. They readily took to the notion that you had sent the robbers here, and that you were waiting somewhere to send them on their way rejoicing."

"The colonel knows who these men are?"

"Yes. Bullion Red had one of the sheriff's posters in his pocket."

Ruddle reflected intently.

"Can we open the front door?" he asked.

"Readily. The key's in the lock."

"Pull off your boots, as I have done, securing them to your suspenders, and go and set that door ajar."

The order was executed in silence.

"Pity there's no chance to get a crack at him!" whispered the bishop, as Shawgun came back to him. "I have changed my plans since the first attack upon him—since this afternoon even—and my only idea concerning him now is to get him out of my path forever!"

"But you can't touch him now, sir," warned Shawgun. "They've got a bell hung in such a way that the colonel has only to raise his hand to alarm the whole camp."

"Then we must wait. The essential is to get away with Horrucks and his chums. We can't leave them to be pinched. They might betray my connection with them. Besides," and his eyes glowed like fire, "I want to give Hatton the surprise of finding them gone. We'll take 'em away with us."

The grim energy of Bishop Ruddle was reflected in the face of his younger companion.

"It can be done," he said. "The coast was clear when I looked out. You can carry one of the sleepers, and Jerry and I will carry the others."

"I'll call him."

The bishop stepped to the entrance of the passage and beckoned.

Jerry made his appearance—in his stocking-feet, like the others.

The three determined, daring men were adequate to the task before them.

"It's a pity we can't wait an hour—till those servants and Bert Taber are asleep," whispered the bishop. "But we can't! The colonel'll soon open that door! We must act immediately, taking our chances. Only, if we are discovered, woe to the discoverer! Let 'em have it, hot and heavy!"

"Oh, our chance is a good one," returned Shawgun. "That stable-boy and his sister are asleep already, and such may be the case with Taber. As to the colonel, his thoughts are of his wife, or of the letters he is writing. Even if he hears and sees us, we have only to drop him promptly, and we shall readily be able to get away with our robbers under cover of the confusion we leave behind us!"

"True," breathed Ruddle. "But there is no necessity of the least noise. Do as I do! Shoulder your man, each of you, and come!"

Raising Horrucks bodily from the floor, the bishop took his way out of the house in silence, and Jerry and Shawgun hastened to follow his example.

How they watched and listened, with every step, will readily be imagined.

But no alarm was given.

Not a sound arose behind them, save the heavy breathing and snoring which had amply covered their colloquies.

They could only conclude that Shawgun's hopeful suggestions had been realized, and that Bert and the servants were asleep.

Once fairly out of the house, the three daring rescuers took every possible advantage of their burdens, taking the sleepers on their backs and shoulders, and thus carrying them without any trouble or fatigue worth a mention.

Unseen and unheard, and still favored in every way by their circumstances and surroundings, the bishop and his assistants reached the spot where the carriage had been left, and in a few minutes more were hurrying homeward with the rescued robbers at a gallop.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BISHOP SCORES HEAVILY.

The joy of the bishop and his men was intense.

"We'll stick to the old trail, Jerry, till we have turned the head of the lake," said the bishop to his coachman, who had taken his accustomed place on the box, "and then we'll take our short-cut across the open, reaching home by the back way!"

"In fact, just as we drove the other night—with the lady!"

"Exactly."

For a few minutes the bishop listened intently, with his keenest ear turned toward the Gentile camp, and still the silence remained unbroken in that quarter.

"They may go to sheol now in their own fashion," he finally muttered, his round, rosy face glowing with defiance. "Alarm or no alarm, it's all the same to us! There's no man hereabouts who keeps better horses than I do, and no pursuit from the Gentile camp will now be able to overtake us!"

He drew a flask from a side-pocket, taking a liberal dram from it, and then passed the same to Shawgun, who in turn handed it to Jerry, who drained it and placed it in his pocket, preparatory to a new filling.

"Of course we shall run some risk of encountering that sheriff and his party near home," added Ruddle, with the same grim energy he had all along displayed, "but if such is their fate, so much the worse for them! We'll begin firing at sight, and shoot as long as there is a head perpendicular!"

He drew a black crape over his face and handed to each of his companions one of the three rifles with which the carriage had been equipped for the expedition.

Both Shawgun and Jerry concealed their features in like manner, and then the three men drew on their boots.

"There's another point I overheard, bishop, as I lay in that reception-room," observed Shawgun, "and that is that the colonel and his crew have sent a detective in quest of us. Perhaps the fellow is that very chap who is now riding with the sheriff. His name is Morgan—Hardy Morgan. I've seen him figuring at the Gentile camp as a miner."

"A detective, eh?" muttered Ruddle, with a lurid glow in his eyes which even the darkness could not conceal. "Well, 'forewarned is forearmed.' Let him look well to the holes he ventures into, or he may never come out!"

Little more was said until the carriage had rolled several miles upon an almost barren plain, headed as directly as possible for the bishop's residence, which lay almost in a line with the Goshute Pass.

"You'd better draw up at the opening and water the horses, Jerry," he then said, "and jog them in. I want them to be cooled off by the time they reach the stable."

The halt was duly made, and thereafter the journey was continued at a moderate pace, with constant watchfulness and an occasional momentary halt to listen.

"The sheriff has doubtless gone up the lake road a piece in the direction of our camp," at length observed the bishop, as the carriage struck a cross-road within half a mile of his abode. "I would not be afraid to bet that he's not within ten miles of us at this moment. Nevertheless, Jerry, we'll be as guarded as possible. Go around to the rear with Shawgun and our friends, and do not drive up to the stable till I show you a light."

The carriage coming to a halt again, in obedience to a gesture, the bishop sprung out and pursued his way homeward on foot, taking the crape from his face as soon as he was clear of the vehicle, which proceeded quietly toward its destination by the route which had been prescribed for it.

After going a short distance the bishop lighted a taper about the size of a match and carefully examined the road.

"No wheeled vehicle has passed in either direction since we left the house," he muttered, as he extinguished the taper and resumed progress. "The sheriff and the detective are still a long distance behind us."

Reaching the entrance gate of his premises, he lighted his taper again and looked for a wisp of straw he had left poised under the latch in such a way that it would fall to the ground the moment the latch was raised.

The wisp was still where he had left it.

Smiling his satisfaction as he suppressed his light with his fingers, the bishop climbed briskly over the fence near the gate and took his way up a long lane which led past the end of his house to the stable.

At a curtained window in the second story was visible a faint gleam of light which told the bishop that no one had been inquiring for him

in his absence and that no visitor was present, thus conveying a double signification.

Proceeding past the house and along the lane, Ruddle suddenly halted, lighting his taper for the third time, and glanced at a thread which was stretched completely across the lane from one fence to the other in such a way that no person or animal could pass in either direction without breaking the thread and thus announcing their presence and passage.

"Yes, the coast is clear," muttered Ruddle, placing the fragment of taper in one of his vest pockets, and stepping carefully over the thread and continuing his way. "And a fine time Mr. Detective'll have here long before he gets quite accustomed to my ways and works."

Promptly reaching his stable, he gave himself admittance, after careful attention to another private sign, and hastened to place a light in one of the rear windows.

Five minutes later Jerry made his appearance with the carriage and horses by a rear entrance.

At a convenient point of the route, which was a portion of a lane well embowered in arching and overhanging trees, Jerry had removed the crape from his face, as had Shawgun, and the couple had thus passed from the character of masked outlaws of the plains into their own habitual footings.

"Lively, boys," was the greeting of Ruddle, as the carriage rolled into the stable. "Change these horses for the blacks as soon as you can."

The task was executed in silence and with as little noise as possible, and then Ruddle looked at his watch.

"The blacks have simply been exercised, not used, for a week past," he said, as he patted each of the magnificent animals in turn, surveying them critically. "I have never seen them in finer condition, Jerry."

"Yes, sir!"

"Get into that seat!"

The coachman hastened to obey.

"You'll remember, Jerry," pursued Ruddle, "that you have under the seats food and drink, with clothes and other supplies—everything, in a word, of which these men have need—and now for your instructions. You'll drive through the Goshute Pass, take the Goshute Valley Stage Road north, and so make your way through the Holland Pass and Middle Pass to the Utah line, which you'll strike in the Pilot Range. Understand?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"Make as good time as you can, but be careful, and use discretion. You ought to reach the line, if all goes well, soon after daybreak. Then turn into some snug wayside covert, and bring your passengers to their senses, if they are not previously recovered, by giving them water without and whisky within. Stay by them till they're on their pegs, and then give them my blessing, with this roll of money. Don't lose it. It contains a thousand dollars. Thus fed, clothed and equipped—for you may add these rifles to their revolvers—it will be their own fault if they ever make the acquaintance of Sheriff Atwell, or if they ever show their heads again in Nevada. Make all this plain to them, as you bid them farewell, and then take your way home with as little display as possible. Unless I get a wire to the contrary, I'll expect you in the course of the coming night. Anything to ask?"

"No, sir," answered Jerry, as he carefully pocketed the money which had been handed him. "I know just what I am to do."

"Then I've only another word to add," said the bishop. "I'd like very much to beat the colonel and his man out of these robbers, and if you make a success of the project, at the same time keeping my action in the premises from all human eyes, I will hand you a present upon your return that will simply astonish you."

Bowing in a gratified way, and at the same time shaking the hand offered him, while Shawgun opened the stable doors, Jerry gathered up his reins and set out upon the long drive before him, with an air which showed how faithfully he intended to execute the mission confided to him, and what bright hopes he had of the future.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BISHOP AND HIS GUESTS.

The residence of Bishop Ruddle had been built something less than a year.

It was an elegant villa of two stories, with an interior court and numerous wings and verandas, the whole of such an ornate character as to indicate the possession of unlimited wealth.

It stood a few miles southwest of Spruce Mount, which the post-office authorities have chortened to Sprucemont, there being at the hamlet a post-office of the fourth class.

After a few orders to Shawgun, who divided with Jerry the care of the horses, not to speak of a great deal of extra work outside of the sort we have seen him accomplishing, the bishop left the stable, taking his way to the house, into which he gave himself admittance at a side-door with celerity and silence, without disturbing any of its inmates, he having a pass-key.

Pausing in the hall, and listening a few moments, to assure himself that all was still around him, the bishop took his way into a

large, splendidly furnished apartment which he was pleased to call his study.

Here a lamp was burning dimly, as he had left it several hours before.

Throwing himself on a satin-covered lounge, he drew a long breath of relief, with the air of a man who has fought and conquered, winning a very gratifying victory.

The bishop was beginning to get stout, displaying a form which indicated high living and indolence, as well as the sway of coarse passions, and was not far from fifty years of age.

He was widely known in his particular field, and was generally considered one of the most active, capable, and zealous luminaries of the Mormon Hierarchy.

It was in consequence of this flattering reputation that he had been sent into Nevada as an apostle and organizer, with a "supplement" from the Secret Funds of the Church of the Latter Day Saints of twenty thousand dollars per annum.

The bishop had so well championed polygamy, in deed as in word, that he had no less than eleven or twelve wives on the average, and had even possessed fifteen for a time, or until a sickly season, a bad case of measles, and one or two other exceptional circumstances had reduced the number to the general average.

Curious to relate, however, the bishop did not live with any of his wives regularly, but kept them scattered around at a distance, each in a little home of her own, in which he was scarcely more than a passing pilgrim.

Perhaps this was not so economical as a wholesale boarding-house arrangement would have been, but it was more conducive to peace and harmony.

At times, during the holidays and other festive seasons, when his peripatetic ardor was at its height, the bishop had much the appearance of a solemn pedagogue in the ever-popular act of "boarding around."

His daughter Millsie was the mistress of his grand mansion, and she was assisted by a maiden aunt of uncertain age, stalwart frame, and forbidding aspect, who would have been a paying investment as the guardian of a farm-house in a neighborhood where tramps are particularly rampant, couchant and devourant.

The bishop was enormously wealthy, chiefly through a lucky find of silver mines and a rapid rise in land, of which he still possessed many thousands of acres, not merely in Utah, but also in Nevada, after selling enough to form a State as large as Rhode Island.

As still as had been his entrance, the bishop had scarcely seated himself, taking off his boots and coat and making himself comfortable, when there came a gentle knock at the inner door of the apartment.

"It's only Monee and I, papa," called the voice of his daughter, who had been taught to announce herself audibly, as the bishop was nervous about opening a door until he knew who was his visitor.

Arising and crossing the floor with a pleased air, the bishop turned a key in the lock and drew the door wide open.

"Come in, my dear children," he invited, with his most gracious flourish of the hand and the most graceful inclination of his person.

Millsie complied, almost forcing to precede her the lovely Indian girl who had accompanied her from Franklin Lake, and who had for several days been a guest at the bishop's residence, with Mee-an-kah.

Monee, it appeared, was her name.

She was the youngest daughter of the old Piute chief, whose old-time strength of character had been most charmingly blended in her, with the beauty and graces she had received from her mother.

Monee was scarcely more than a child in years, but she had the sensitive, thoughtful heart of a woman.

She had received the best of educations, having graduated with distinguished honors at the renowned Indian university which was lately destroyed by fire at Tahlequah.

In language as in manners, she was in no wise inferior to the most distinguished graduates of Vassar.

Her face was now a trifle paler than usual, and her eyes had lost their wonted fire, gloom and dejection seeming to have taken possession of her.

"What ails my sweet daughter?" continued the bishop, as he seized Monee's hand and pressed it to his lips, then conducting her to a seat. "Why has the sunshine departed from her eyes, and the smile from her face?"

Monee heaved a deep sigh, averting her face from the searching glance bent upon it.

"It's because her father has made himself drunk again and gone to bed with his boots on," blurted Millsie, as coolly as if she had been announcing what o'clock it was. "She feels very bad about his performances, which I think are only amusing."

"Well, there is nothing to feel bad about, my child," said Ruddle, sitting down between the girls and caressing the hand he still retained. "Mee-an-kah is getting old and pays very little attention to what we choose to call the exigencies of society. But his heart is in the right,

place. He loves you, Monee. He's good and truthful. He's even great and honorable."

"But it's so awkward to have him do such things in a house which is really a palace, and where he is treated with such kindness!" returned Monee, as tears gathered in her eyes. "Besides—he seems to fail so rapidly with these excesses, now that he is getting so old! He does little but sleep, and I fancy it would now be impossible to waken him. I thought this morning he would never waken again."

The bishop looked vacantly into a corner of the apartment in such a way that the young princess of the Piutes could not see his face, which had a strangely conscious and contented expression.

"Oh, he's all right, Monee," came from the ghoul-like lips of Ruddle, as his glance fluttered back to the maiden's face. "You must remember that he was not brought up as we were, my dear, and that he is too far advanced in life to change habits which have become a second nature."

Monee smiled sadly as she looked up into the sphinx-like countenance of the man of mystery and crime beside her.

"I know, sir," she said, "that you are only too ready to excuse him. But all this worries me. I shall insist upon taking him home to our mountain cottage to-morrow."

The bishop started, fairly holding his breath. The announcement seemed to shock him.

"Nonsense," he said. "You must be patient as I am. Let's try, between us, Monee, to keep all intoxicating drink from your father, with the exception of the choice wine we share with him at the table. Don't think of leaving us. Millsie would not know what to do without you, so much do you seem to her like a dearly-loved sister as short as has been your stay with us. Be guided by me, love. These little defects in your father's character are of far less account than the spots on the sun. If we cannot cure, we can certainly put up with them with all due charity and affection. Then tell me that you will be patient and hopeful, taking my advice, and that you will say no more about leaving us at present."

He looked so kindly, so smiling, such a true friend at that moment that the heart of the lonely Indian girl warmed toward him.

"Let everything be as you wish, sir," she replied, throwing her arms around him and kissing him with a childlike simplicity and honesty that called a flush to his cheeks. "We will remain at least another day."

"That's a good girl," commented the bishop, following her example as she arose. "Millsie has been busy to-day, but you will have her all to yourself to-morrow. Be smiling and happy. Good-night, my child. Sweet repose and pleasant dreams."

A simple but fervent response was uttered by Monee, who then moved toward the door.

"I want to say a few words to papa, dear, about household matters for to-morrow," said Millsie to Monee, "but I will follow you in a moment."

Monee bowed to the bishop and retired as gracefully as she had come, closing the door behind her.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RUBY KING.

WHAT a change was that which came over the faces of the father and daughter when the eyes of Monee were no longer upon them!

It was as if a mask had dropped from their faces, or as if they had exchanged the mask of comedy for that of the assassin!

"I understood from your gesture that you desired to see me alone, papa," observed Millsie, as she seated herself with a sigh of weariness. "There's now a chance to say what you mean and act as you feel."

"To begin with," returned Ruddle, as he resumed his seat, "I would like to see you a little more gracious in mien and considerably more choice in your language. For a day or two you seem to be in a chronic ill-temper."

"Well, how could it be otherwise, shut up in the same house with her?"

She looked after Monee, with a toss of the head in that direction, and an ungracious pout appeared upon her lips.

"What has she done, Millsie?"

"It is not what she has done, papa, but what she is! I hate the sight of her! It mortifies me to death to see how completely I am eclipsed in every particular by her."

"She is certainly very beautiful, very lady-like, very brilliantly educated," returned the bishop, with a far-off, dreamy look, "and she possesses many other points in which I could wish you to be like her. Even her dark complexion is rather a charm than a defect, since it serves as a sort of background for her brightness and vivacity."

"Better take her for your twenty-fourth, then," murmured Millsie. "I am sure you think a great deal more of her than you do of me!"

"Millsie," returned Ruddle, without the least change of tone or manner, "your mother was a first-class termagant, and I am sorry to see that

you are so much like her. Unless you can outgrow this inherited drawback, you are doomed to be an old maid."

"I do not care," was the response. "I've given up all idea of finding a man to suit me. Here's this Bert Taber, for instance, the kind of a man I could worship. But how am I presented to him? In such a way that he must regard me with contempt and aversion, if he ever gives me a thought. Why is it that 'I am always the victim of an adverse fate! With all my advantages of wealth and social position, I have passed my twenty-second mile-post, and have never really had an admirer, to say nothing of a suitor!'"

"Oh, yes. Don't do yourself injustice, dear. You will remember that Elder Tanner has done us the honor to speak to me about you—"

"Tanner?" The girl shrugged her shoulders impatiently. "I'd as soon be the thing his name represents as to become his seventh. A man nearly as old as you are, and a toothless old beggar, whose only idea in speaking about me is to get a slice of your fortune!"

The bishop laughed, in spite of all he had said about the desirability of an improvement in the girl's language.

He even rubbed his hands together contentedly.

"You are right about the Elder," he admitted, "but it's unwise to sigh after the hero of a novel—a man like this Bert Taber, for instance, since you have mentioned him. Taber's intention is to marry Hatton's daughter. He has been seen staring at her picture half an hour at a time, and yet he has never seen her! So, you needn't waste a thought on him, you see."

Millsie's face became still more gloomy. "Let's change the subject, papa," she said. "I'm sick of the whole human family!"

"Good," commented Ruddle. "Between ourselves, Millsie, the view you have reached is the beginning of wisdom. Rid of all sickly romance, let us build on reality. Your turn will soon come. All you need is to appear in the right way, and in the right place, and your beauty and genuine merit will not go begging. We'll take a trip to the Old World soon and you shall marry some prince or duke!"

The girl's gloom vanished at the thought. "How soon can we go?" she asked. "Must our movements depend upon this drunken coot of a savage?"

"If they do, they will not depend upon him long," returned Ruddle, with a significant smile. "He's killing himself rapidly with the rich living and unlimited drink with which I supply him!"

"But those rubies, papa?" and Millsie lowered her voice to a whisper. "And that lost mine? Is this secret to die with him?"

"No, dear. He admits that Monee shares all his knowledge. And should he die to-night, we have simply to transfer our attention to his daughter. In one way or another, we will find out what they know. But there is only one way to do it. We must keep them here indefinitely, or as long as may be necessary, ostensibly as our honored guests, but in reality as our prisoners! This is the vital point of the situation, and it is to drill this point into your mind that I desired to see you alone."

"I understood this before, papa," returned Millsie. "I am to watch them—to not let them get out of the house unseen, and to not let any one have speech with them."

"The situation is this, you see," declared the bishop. "As Hatton knows all we know about these treasures, he is quite as greedy as we are to get hold of them. His one thought by day and night is to take Mee-an-kah and his daughter into his keeping. We must foil him, or we shall lose millions!"

"You believe, then—"

"I know all about it! For hundreds of years the ancestors of Mee-an-kah, each in his turn, have been spoken of as the *Ruby King*! More, this was the title generally applied to Mee-an-kah when Colonel Hatton first came to this valley. You make a great mistake in speaking of him as a 'drunken coot.' Mee-an-kah is every inch a sovereign. He has many qualities which I shall always sigh in vain to possess. He has his own idea of the responsibilities resting upon him in the matter of these treasures. His people are reduced to a mere remnant, but he does not look for their extinction. He told me yesterday that his rubies and other treasures are a sacred heritage for his daughter, who is destined to be the mother of a mighty nation. Call it a dream, if you will, but admit with me that it is a noble one, and that the soul of that man is a soul of sterling integrity and grandeur, which makes such a mousing and unscrupulous schemer as I am look small by comparison. With all his faults, he has a keen realization of what is right and proper and becoming, and I have no doubt we shall have a great deal of difficulty in carrying our point with him. If we succeed at all, it will be because you second all my plans for securing his confidence and for keeping both father and daughter in such seclusion that they cannot escape us, and that no one can rescue them from our clutches."

"Depend upon me, papa!" returned Millsie,

springing up lightly. "And this is all for the present?"

"All, Millsie—except that I want you to realize that I am plotting and toiling for you only," and the bishop drew her to his heart a moment, pressing a kiss upon her forehead. "The Ruby King shall not escape us! You shall yet be his heiress!"

"I hope so, I am sure. And you know that I love you, papa! Forgive all my faults. When you take me abroad, perhaps I can be made over into something more pleasant."

And with this she vanished. Locking himself in, the bishop extinguished his light and seated himself near one of the front windows of the apartment, raising the same a couple of feet to admit the cool night air.

Deeply thoughtful and desperately determined, he mused upon the best plans of securing the heirlooms of Mee-an-kah and his daughter.

He had been alone less than five minutes, however, when he heard a carriage approaching from the direction of the lakes.

Looking out, with the aid of a glass he recognized the horses and vehicle as his own.

The rig was the same with which Shawgun had driven Horricks and his pals to the colonel's.

"Ah! visitors, at this late hour!" breathed Ruddle, as the carriage came to a halt at his front gate. "What do they want?"

CHAPTER XVII.

A SHARP GAME OF BLUFF.

THE first step of the bishop was to undress and put on a night-shirt and night-cap, which he did with singular quickness, thus giving himself the aspect of a man just aroused from his slumbers.

Then he looked out again, with an air of grim and sarcastic defiance.

Two men had left the carriage outside of the gate, for the simple reason that they could not open a passage nearer, and were coming up the drive toward the house.

Ruddle recognized them with sufficient precision when they had arrived within a few rods of the front veranda.

They were Atwell and Morgan, of whom he had taken a good view at the moment when they rode away from the colonel's.

Reaching the front entrance, with considerable conversation and other noise, the two men rung and knocked, the bishop having supplied his elegant residence with the appurtenances for both of these measures, and thus placed his friends and intimates in a position to convey to him, by these combined agencies—the necessity arising—a great variety of news, as we may have occasion to see later.

Smiling sardonically in his concealment, Ruddle allowed his visitors to ring and pound until even a deaf man might have found fault with the demonstration, and then he lighted a lamp, and thrust his head out of a window of his sleeping apartment, which adjoined his study.

"I will be there in a moment," he said.

Slipping a revolver into a pocket which had been made for it in the right hip of his night-shirt, he proceeded to execute his promise, but not without giving himself the slow and uncertain gait of a man who is not fully awake and is still struggling to "pull himself together."

It was, in fact, a full minute after his appearance at the window before the bishop presented himself at the door, and slowly unlocked it, drawing its bolts and removing its chains.

But finally he appeared to the gaze of the visitors, looking quite spectral in his dishabille, and rubbing his eyes, at the same time that he shaded them from the rays of the lamp he carried in his hand.

In short, his whole aspect was that of a man rudely awakened from the sweetest and soundest of slumbers.

"We're told that Bishop Ruddle lives here," said Atwell, bowing.

"Quite correct," answered Ruddle, sharply watchful, without allowing the fact to become visible. "I am the bishop."

"We have brought home your horses and carriage, sir," pursued the sheriff, who had taken upon himself the office of spokesman, so as to leave Morgan at leisure to survey his surroundings.

"My horse and wagon?" returned the bishop, with well-simulated amazement. "Mine, did you say?"

"Yes, sir—yours!"

The bishop looked as bewildered as if he had been tossed in a cyclone.

Then he clutched the door and partially closed it, affecting to believe that such a preposterous statement could only be a prelude to an assault or other villainy.

"My horse?" he repeated.

The visitors both nodded, the detective's entire attention having focused upon the bishop's consummate acting.

"There must be some mistake, gentlemen," assured the bishop. "I have no horses or vehicles outside of my stable at this moment."

The declaration was wholly unexpected by the visitors, who had presumed that the bishop would take refuge in some such declaration as

that the team had been stolen, or was out of the stable without his knowledge.

They were considerably taken aback.

"Are you sure?" asked the sheriff.

"So sure of it," replied the bishop, with a sarcastic smile, "that I will sell all my right and title to the rig in question for a penny postage stamp. May I ask to whom I have the honor of speaking?"

"I'm the sheriff of the county, Mr. Atwell," answered that official, "and my friend is Mr. Morgan, who is working a claim at the Gentile camp."

"Glad to make your acquaintance, gentlemen," said the bishop, with careless civility, "but I really know nothing about the horses intercepted. Where did you find them?"

"At Colonel Hatton's."

"Hatton's?"

The bishop repeated the name with the aspect of a man trying to recall where he had heard it.

"Oh, he's a gentleman who resides at the camp in question," he resumed. "Of course he's above suspicion of having come by the horses illegally. Were they left on his premises by the thieves?"

"Such is our theory, sir," said Atwell.

The bishop smiled unobtrusively.

He was pleased to hear, with such innocent directness, that his visitors had nothing better than *theory* to act upon.

"Of course you'll kindly excuse me for not asking you in at this late hour, gentlemen," observed Ruddle, blandly. "I can only repeat that the rig is not mine, nor do I think that any is missing from this neighborhood."

After this explicit declaration, there was nothing more to be said.

The sheriff and detective found themselves politely bowed out.

What could they say?

Accuse the bishop, then and there, of being a liar and a hypocrite?

Charge him with crime?

Even accuse him of sending Bullion Red and his pals to kill the colonel?

Preposterous!

What proof had they?

The two men knew the power of money and the strength of the Mormon element in Nevada too well to be capable of any such rashness.

Besides, it was not wise to be too bold or aggressive, or to put the bishop too much on his guard.

"I suppose you have seen nothing of any suspicious characters in this vicinity, bishop?" ventured Atwell, after an awkward pause.

"Nothing whatever. But my failure to encounter them is not a proof of their non-existence. The fact is, I've had another attack of the gout, and have not been out of the house for several days past."

The visitors turned away, with the aspect of men who have received their final "sockdolager."

"Kindly excuse us for disturbing you, bishop," said the sheriff, with a polite bow. "From the elegance of the carriage, and the excellence of the horses, we could only suppose that it belonged to you."

"Thanks for the compliment," said Ruddle, as he bowed and smiled, "but I trust I am not the only gentleman in Nevada who is the possessor of a fine turnout."

And with this he withdrew, closing the door and securing it, and returned to his study, while the sheriff and detective took their departure.

Extinguishing his light, the bishop watched them with his glass until they had returned to their vehicle and ridden away in the direction of the lakes, by the same route by which they had come.

"Give me another call when you feel like it," he then muttered, mockingly, as he proceeded to dress himself. "You'll have to get up early in the morning, and brace up with high living, before you'll get the start of your humble servant."

CHAPTER XVIII.

FATHER AND SON.

AS late as was the hour, the bishop did not manifest the least intention of going to bed.

To the contrary, after dressing himself fully, he resumed his seat by one of the front windows of his study, and gave himself up to the solace of a fine cigar.

If the changing expression of his countenance attested that there were unpleasant points in his reflections, his general mien was nevertheless one of profound satisfaction.

His affairs were all prosperous.

The habitual good luck of many a long year was still with him.

Two or threetimes he looked from his window, at short intervals, listening intently.

At length he glanced at his watch.

"It is time he were here," was the thought displayed in his every look and movement.

Clearly enough, he not only expected an arrival at that late hour, but this arrival was one in which he had an intense interest.

He had turned to the window two or three times more, with constantly increasing impa-

tience, when a horseman was seen coming across lots toward the house.

A curious fact is involved in this circumstance.

The bishop and his intimates made little use of the great gate and the drive, but came and went in their own peculiar fashion.

In this respect, as in so many others, their ways were not the ways of all the world.

"Ah, there he is," muttered the bishop, audibly, and in joyous accents, as he arose briskly. "I'll take a bite with him."

He took his way quietly down to the dining-room, which occupied a rear corner of the dwelling, and proceeded to turn up a couple of lamps which Millsie had left burning.

Then he glanced at the quantity and quality of the supplies which had been left upon the table in anticipation of this arrival.

The bishop not only smiled, but his smile deepened with every dish his glances encountered.

The food was not only of a kind to tempt an epicure, but there was enough of it for a dozen men.

"No doubt he'll be thirsty as well as hungry," thought the bishop. "If he isn't, I am. We may as well celebrate. His news are excellent, I cannot doubt."

Lighting a small lamp, he opened a door conveniently near, and took his way down a long flight of stairs into a vault which was filled with all sorts of wines and liquors, both foreign and domestic. Selecting a bottle of Chateau Yquem of favorite date, he returned to the dining-room and drew the cork, placing the bottle beside the plate of the man for whom he was waiting.

A final critical glance told him that nothing had been forgotten, and he helped himself to the chair at the head of the table and waited.

The object of all these solicitous attentions soon made his appearance.

He was Smith Ruddle, the son of the bishop, a young mansomewhere between twenty-four and twenty-five years of age.

He was not the only son of Ruddle, no more than Millsie was his only daughter—far from it—but he was the only one who had ever been seen at the bishop's stately residence.

Smith was fairly endowed, both in mind and body, but he had inherited many of the bishop's bad qualities, and had also been at least a silent partner in many of his father's nefarious transactions.

It was not to be wondered at, therefore, that he was not troubled by scruples of any description in regard to the laws of the land or the rights of his fellows.

In a word, he was a polished rascal.

He was attired in a rich, but somewhat loud and showy style, and wore a profusion of rings and other jewelry, including a singular-looking gold serpent which was coiled around one of his forefingers, and which had a couple of fine brilliants for its eyes.

The son had followed so nearly in his father's footsteps, that he already had three wives living, not to mention one or two he had lost.

He was also wealthy in his own right.

As was also the case with the father, it is doubtful if any other person than Smith Ruddle himself could have told just where the wives of Smith Ruddle were living.

Certain it is, that their wives entered only casually into the lives of either father or son.

Smith entered the dining-room with a brisk and elastic step, as with a smiling and contented mien, which attested that all his affairs were in a satisfactory condition.

"Glad to see you back, Smith," greeted the bishop, smilingly. "But I must say that you have one fault I hope to see corrected. You are too transparent."

"You think so?" returned Smith, with an answering smile, as he took his seat at the table.

"Oh, it's true. Anybody, however indifferent, could see, by a single glance at you, that you have made a success of all you have been trying to do to day."

"True, father, but how many persons will get that 'single glance' at me? I do not carry my soul on my lips to anybody save you."

The bishop stirred uneasily, as one who has suddenly received a check.

"That's true," he admitted. "I acknowledge the corn, and shall be glad to make amends with your favorite."

He seized the bottle of wine we have particularized, and filled Smith's glass and his own.

"As I have permitted you to see, father," remarked Smith, after tasting the wine, "I have good news for you. Everything is as it should be."

He gave his attention to the tempting dishes before him, helping the bishop to some of them, and being helped to others, and then he resumed:

"I have received from Gail a letter for Colonel Hatton which arrived this morning. This letter is from Effie Hatton, and announces that she will be here to-morrow morning."

"Ah! so soon!" commented the bishop.

"To verify the letter," pursued Smith, "I have telegraphed to our agent Eastward, and he has sent me ample confirmation of this intelligence. The girl is on the train, and will arrive

at the time mentioned. She would have been here a day sooner, it seems, if she had not stopped in Chicago to visit an aunt."

"Can her father have got any news, Smith, of the exact date of her arrival?" asked the bishop.

"No, sir—neither by mail nor telegraph. Gail is my authority for one of these routes, and our secret ticker, which steals all messages from the wire at pleasure, is an ample guarantee for the other."

"Then you'll have no trouble about intercepting the fair traveler?"

"Not the slightest."

"Of course she will leave the train at Wells?"

"No doubt of it, and it is at Wells that I shall intercept her."

"But what if she should oversleep, or make the mistake her mother did, and go on to Elko?"

"Why, I should simply go on to Elko in the train with her, and take her into my keeping there. As you see, therefore, I am prepared for all contingencies. The girl cannot possibly escape the fate we have planned for her. She is just as sure to fall into my clutches as she is to reach Nevada."

The rejoicing that succeeded was worthy of a couple of demons.

CHAPTER XIX.

A PRECIOUS PAIR.

"AND when she is in our hands?" asked Ruddle, after marked attention to his Chateau Yquem. "Where shall we hide her?"

"That is a matter I have left optional, as it may depend upon circumstances," replied the son; "but she'll vanish no less completely than her mother has disappeared before her. How are matters here? Is the old chief drunk when he's not asleep?"

The bishop nodded assent.

"But you don't get any information about his rubies or the lost mine?"

"Not a particle. He has declared, however, that Monee knows all he knows, and upon this showing I am tempted to give him in his food or drink a dose that will put him out of the way forever!"

"Good," returned Smith. "That's the only course to take, and you cannot take it too soon. By getting rid of the old coot, as Millsie calls him, we shall have only the girl to deal with, and I will be responsible for her from this hour onward!"

The young reprobate emptied his glass at a swallow, as if the prey of an unwonted nervous excitement.

The bishop looked at him keenly.

"What do you mean, Smith?"

"I mean that I am quite an admirer of Monee and that I have already proposed to her to marry me."

"Ah! and been accepted?"

"Nothing of the sort. Language fails to say with what scorn and contempt she rejected me. When pressed, she said something about expecting to marry a gentleman of her own people!"

"A gentleman, eh?" sneered the bishop. "A fine gentleman, indeed! One of those chaps, I suppose, whose only garment is a worn-out mop! So much for carrying University learning to that sort of heathen. What do you propose to do?"

"First, I will marry her," answered Smith, blazing out wrathfully, "and then I'll shut her up in a prison she'll never get out of until the ants carry her out the key-hole! That is, if she don't become obedient and tell me where rubies are to be had by the barrel and gold by the square mile. Where is she now?"

"Abed, long ago."

"So that I shall not see her until afternoon. But here's an idea, father. Why don't you 'go through' Me-an-kah, as he lies in his drunken sleep, and see if he now has any rubies concealed on his person, as he used to have?"

"I've thought of that," replied the bishop.

"According to the reports of Colonel Hatton, as made more than thirty years ago, after the colonel's first visit to Nevada, the chief wears a leather pouch of rubies on his breast, under his shirt, the same being held in place by a cord passed around his neck."

"Was he particularly drunk to-night?"

"No, not unusually so. But he was so drunk that he couldn't move or speak, if that's what you mean. He lies like a log—"

"Then why not go and see if those famous rubies are now on his person?"

"All right, come."

The bishop arose briskly, as did Smith.

"We can finish eating at our leisure after we have settled this point," said the son. "We had better lay off our boots and go up the back way in our stocking-feet. But how are we to get into the old fellow's room? Don't he lock himself in?"

"Never. He leaves his door on the swing, so that Monee can come to his relief, if he should have a fit or be otherwise in want of her. But what if the old chap should arouse from his drunken stupor sufficiently to take notice of what we are doing?"

"Oh, he won't, if I may judge by all I have seen of him."

"But what if he should?" persisted the bishop.

"What if he should yell for assistance?"

"It's possible he may do that," remarked Smith, thoughtfully, as he proceeded to lay off his boots.

"And so call Monee, who is likely to be a very light sleeper. What if he should?"

"It would be a very bad call for him, that's all," declared the son, with grim significance.

"I'd strangle him with the cord he wears around his neck, and take the girl's fate into my hands on the instant."

The bishop looked startled a moment and shook his head, but quickly rallied to a respectful consideration of the idea so bluntly propounded.

"If we were to take such a course, we should know where we stand," he declared. "But do nothing rashly, Smith. There is time to try fair means a while longer."

Producing a candle, which gave sufficient light without being too obtrusive, the bishop led the way cautiously up the stairs, followed by his son.

Both paused on the upper landing to listen.

"Not a sound!" said Smith, in a whisper that could not have been heard more than a yard.

The couple resumed progress.

Gaining the door of the large and splendidly furnished chamber which had been assigned to Mee-an-kah, they noiselessly opened it a few inches, and looked in upon the object of their thoughts.

To all appearance, he was asleep.

"It's all right," whispered the bishop, as he closed the door a moment. "Besides, if he wakes up, I can give forty explanations that will be satisfactory. I can say that the house has just been raided by a band of desperadoes from the Goshute Mountains, who have carried off all our silver, and we feared he had been robbed, as one or two of the intruders came up this way. Yes, this is the sort of story to tell. There is no occasion for alarm, even if the old sinner should wake up. No violence, therefore, just yet, Smith. There can be no occasion for it to-night—none whatever."

Smith answered with a look, and the couple entered the chamber, advancing to the bed, and flashing the rays of his light over the motionless figure upon it.

"As you see, he's sleeping like the dead," observed the bishop, "and I don't wonder at it. He's been drinking like a fish ever since he came. He's so full of spirits that I fancy he would readily ignite if I were to touch him with this lighted candle."

Holding the light in one hand, the bishop devoted the other to the investigation upon which he had entered, proceeding cautiously to unbutton the garments over the tawny and hairy breast of the guest.

"See! there's no cord around his neck!" suddenly whispered Smith Ruddle, with a start.

The bishop thrust his hand through the aperture he had provided, and passed it nervously over the girth and rugged breast.

"Not a trace of the bag of rubies!" he gasped, with features tensely drawn with excitement.

"See if he has a belt around his waist," suggested the son.

The bishop hastily complied.

There was none.

"The infernal old beggar!" muttered the bishop, in a savage fury, as he hastily buttoned up the guest's breast and throat. "He has spent his treasure for drink! He hasn't a ruby in the world—nor a dollar! I'll pitch him out of here, neck and heels, in the morning."

"No, you won't, father! You'll simply get at him in another way. What's the use of treating him as if he were a royal prince? A better way is to thrust him into some hole in the Ruby Cave or elsewhere, and force him to tell what he knows."

"Caution!" enjoined the bishop. "We shall disturb his slumbers."

"No danger. He hasn't stirred since we entered the room. He lies as if dead, as you noticed."

"And so he is—dead drunk! The light does not seem to make the least impression on his eyes," and the bishop waved his candle two or three times, as if experimenting. "Clearly enough, Smith, we must stop dreaming, and get down to a more practical diet."

"That's it—the very word," returned the son, as grimly as quickly. "It's a question of diet! No doubt he can tell us where rubies are to be had, and where that lost mine is. The only requisite is to apply the right sort of treatment. How easy to reach him through Monee!"

"Or to reach Monee through him! She'd soon tell us all she knows about those old treasures sooner than see him starve to death, or otherwise be killed by inches!"

"And, in like manner, we can reach him through his daughter!" suggested the son.

"You see how easy it is! As soon as I have attended to that business from the East in the morning, we'll get at the old chief and his girl in a more rational manner!"

Nodding assent, the bishop led the way toward

the door, and in another moment the terrible couple had retired from the apartment, as noiselessly as they had come.

CHAPTER XX.

A TERROR FOR THE PLOTTERS.

No sooner had Ruddle and his son retired from the chamber of Mee-an-kah, as related, than the old chief opened his eyes and raised himself vigorously to one elbow, looking after the conspirators with blazing eyes.

He was not only conscious of what they had done, but had listened to every word they had exchanged in his presence!

"The poor fools!" he soliloquized, as he slipped out of bed with an agility that was remarkable for a man of his age. "They're what I believed them to be! They have completely unmasked themselves! I see them as they are. It's time to return the favor, and let them see me as I am!"

The words were suggestive, to say the least.

Had the renowned old chief been playing a part?

He certainly proceeded to dress himself with a celerity which suggested that his physical state had not been understood by the Ruddles, and that he was not the sleepy imbecile they had imagined.

"The villains!" he breathed audibly. "They would rob and kill me. This house is as dangerous for Monee and myself as if it were the lair of a tiger! Their kindness is a mere pretense. The heart of that bishop is as black as the night! There is not a particle of humanity about him. He has neither goodness nor conscience. A demon of this world rather than the prophet of another!"

His toilet completed, Mee-an-kah took his way to one of the windows of his apartment which he had left ajar for fresh air, and gave utterance to a cry which was shrill and distinct without being obtrusive, like the pipings of certain kinds of crickets.

Thrice he repeated this cry, at short intervals, and then paused and listened, as if waiting for an answer.

It came after a brief interval, not exactly in kind, but in a very similar sound, which arose from one of the groups of trees upon the lawn, and not a dozen rods from the dwelling.

"Ah, Teecomo is there!" commented the old chief, his wrinkled face lighting up as it had not lighted up before since his entrance into the bishop's princely abode. "He, too, is what I believed him to be, although not after the fashion of these white men. Teecomo is faithful and true!"

Another brief pause succeeded, and then Mee-an-kah passed his head out of the window, looking toward the apartment occupied by Monee and the bishop's daughter, uttering a strange sound, like the chattering of a bird, and which no one unfamiliar with it would have thought of ascribing to a human being.

As light as was that sound, it fixed the attention of Monee, who was still awake, it being one which had been in use for years as a signal between father and daughter.

It meant that she was to come to him as soon as possible.

It had more than once awakened the Indian girl from the soundest of slumbers, and had on several occasions withdrawn her from positive danger.

She was prompt to heed it now.

Slipping out of bed, with a caution worthy of her race, she prepared herself for a visit to her father in his apartment.

As she had lain down partially dressed, her toilet was soon completed.

Pausing only long enough to see that Millsie was still fast asleep, Monee glided from the room, closing the door behind her, and in a few moments more was in her father's presence.

She was astonished to see him up and dressed, and occupying a seat by the window.

He smiled a welcome, as she could see by the moonlight and starlight that streamed in at the window.

"You were awake?" he said, in a low tone, advancing a chair for her use.

"Yes, father. Your signal gave me such a start. I never expected to hear it again!"

"Why not, child?"

"You have been so weak lately, and have slept so much in the daytime!"

"Are you sure I slept, Monee?"

His tone was so peculiar that the girl looked startled.

"Or did I only pretend to sleep? And was my weakness in great part assumed?"

"What! you have been playing a part?"

"Ever since we came here, child, like all the rest, save you!"

"Oh, papa!"

She threw her arms about the old chief and caressed him convulsively.

"I am so glad," she murmured. "You have given me the greatest surprise of my life! You are far stronger than any of my supposed!"

"Like mother earth from whom I came!"

"And those pretended slumbers?"

"Were merely a pretense, designed to give me a chance to watch those around us!"

"You've not been ill?"

"Not for a moment."

"You—you still look forward to long years of life with your own, own Monee?"

"With the smile of the Great Spirit—yes."

The joy of Monee, in the unexpected revelation of that moment, was too great to be concealed.

She wept joyful tears.

"And you never suspected this little masquerade?" resumed Mee-an-kah, as he gently caressed her long, dark tresses.

"No, papa. And, oh! I've been so miserable!"

"You should have had more faith in me, or you should have been more observant."

"And your motives?"

"I wanted to see this bishop as he is," explained Mee-an-kah. "To begin with, it seemed very strange to me that he should intrude into our lovely mountain home and insist, with so many armed friends, that we should become his guests for a few days. You will remember that he said we were in danger from certain outlaws hidden in the hills."

"It was not so, papa?"

"No, child. The only danger which menaces us comes from him!"

"But you came!"

"As the least of two evils, not wishing to give him any excuse for treating us badly. Besides, I wanted to see for myself the truth concerning him. We came here accordingly. To all appearance the bishop was an honest, kindly man, who would befriend us both. But I was not long in detecting that we were really prisoners rather than guests. His whole thought is of rubies, of the old traditions of our tribe, of the Ruby Cave and the lost mine. In a word, he wants to seize all we possess, and then—Oh, how horrible!"

He trembled suddenly at the recollection of the indignities to which he had been subjected.

Monee readily saw that something very exceptional had occurred, and hastily demanded to be taken wholly into the old chief's confidence.

In a few rapid, burning sentences he told her of the visit of the father and son to his room, and reported textually the horrible conversation which had passed between the two unscrupulous plotters.

"As you see from all this, my child," he declared, by way of conclusion, "we must leave this house forever, and leave it this very instant!"

"Yes, father," was Monee's reply. "I am ready to go this instant. I have been afraid of that Smith Ruddle ever since he proposed to me yesterday."

"Proposed! The villain has three or four wives already! But of course he claims that this fact is no bar to having another."

Mee-an-kah arose nervously and collected from the table and wash-stand a few personal effects he did not wish to leave behind him.

"I have done wrong, I fear, to consent to come here," he said.

"Oh, no, papa. He would have resorted to violence, sooner or later, personally or by some of his agents, and we should have been worse off than we are now. It is no small satisfaction to have learned their schemes, and to have such reasons for ever more keeping them at a distance."

"And there is another bright side to this business," said Mee-an-kah, "and that is that it has afforded me an opportunity to thoroughly prove the love, confidence and devotion of Teecomo!"

"Teecomo!" and a glowing radiance lighted up the girl's face. "Is he here?"

"Yes—just outside, within call, and he was here last night and the night before."

"Ah, what gladness!"

There was nothing more to be said at that moment, although the old chief had reserved various explanations for another occasion.

As silently as possible, but also as promptly, he led the way down-stairs and out of the house, hastening toward the spot where Teecomo, who had long been Monee's lover, was in waiting.

As they left the bishop's abode, Millsie looked after them from a window.

Awakened by a noisy peal of laughter from the dining-room, she had missed Monee and hastened to seek her in the chief's room, but only to find them both taking their departure.

A few moments later she burst into the dining-room where the father and son were finishing their Chateau Yquem.

"They've gone!" she gasped. "The old chief and his daughter! They're running away!"

For an instant the bishop and Smith were too startled to speak.

"Quick!" then cried the father. "They have only a minute the start! We can readily over-haul them!"

CHAPTER XXI.

TEECOMO.

Teecomo had a second and more urgent mission in waiting, and was prompt to take action.

He helped Monee and her father into the back seat, in rapid succession, and then took his own place upon the front seat, and gave his wide-awake horses a gentle hint to be moving.

The carriage rolled away as quietly as if it had been going to a funeral.

The route it followed was one Teecomo had laid out to suit himself.

In other words, it wound among the trees in such a way that he came and went unseen without the least trouble.

He stuck to it now, notwithstanding the uproar which had suddenly arisen at the elegant mansion behind him.

"They've missed you," he observed, with a glance at his companions, "and have been very quick about it."

How Monee smiled, as her eyes lingered upon the handsome face of the speaker!

She was all the more pleased to see him from the fact that she had, until that hour, supposed him to be still absent upon a trip in Europe he had undertaken several months before.

"When did you return, Teecomo?" she asked, with scarcely a thought of the tumult behind her.

"Day before yesterday!"

"And I only learn of the fact now!" said Monee, trying to look as reproachful as possible.

"You must settle with the chief about that," returned the young Indian, smilingly. "He knew all about it as soon as I arrived. I have simply obeyed his orders. He told me to keep out of sight."

The girl turned to her father for an explanation.

"I preferred to have Teecomo outside," was what he said, "and with such a team as this at his disposal. He would merely have been an element of discord within that stately den behind us, if I had allowed him to enter it. Smith Ruddle would have become jealous of him, you would have become still more uneasy and still more anxious to leave—"

The maiden placed one fair hand over the paternal lips and listened a moment.

The bishop and his son had given up the attempt to find the fugitives near the house, and were hurrying toward the stable to supply themselves with horses.

"There is no need of telling me, papa, why you have taken such action," resumed the Indian girl. "It is enough that things are just as they are!"

The carriage continued to roll onward, and soon left the bishop's grounds, reaching a cross-road leading to the one by which Jerry and his passengers, Bullion Red and his pals, had reached the stable as related.

Here the fugitives lost the friendly shadows which had served them so well, and the face and figure of Teecomo became more plainly visible.

Like his betrothed, Teecomo had enjoyed the benefits of a University education, and was well versed in several languages, including Spanish and German.

He was dressed in a suit of clothes which had been made in France, and his high, shapely brow was shaded by a sombrero that would have been acceptable to Buffalo Bill or Buck Taylor.

In a word, he was as far from the imaginary red-man of Cooper as from the degraded savage we see hanging about the Overland stations or the sutler's store, being a full-fledged specimen of the results which are now being attained daily by our Indian Missions.

But the "natural man" had not been extinguished in Teecomo.

To the contrary, it had been strengthened.

His new civilization had simply been a development of the old.

He could handle a rifle as well as any of his forefathers had handled them, and he was the peer of any one in all the manly exercises and sports which are always so popular among his people.

"To judge by your letters, Teecomo, you have had a nice time abroad," observed Monee, as the young chief continued to keep one eye upon her and the other upon the horses.

"Yes, Monee, but not so nice as I hope to have some day when I go over the same ground with you."

"Did you find yourself stared at on account of your complexion?"

"A little in England, but not elsewhere. In Holland I was regarded as a Javanese, and the Spaniards and Italians are so dark many of them, as are the *méridionaux* of France, that I received no especial notice among them, and never an insult or rudeness. It is only among the gawky stay-at-homes of our 'glorious Republic' that you will find the idiotic starrer in his full perfection."

"As a matter of fact," said Mee-an-kah, "one sort of color ought to be as respectable as another, and will be, when our race has emerged from its animal condition. In the mean time, it can be only instructive or amusing to see a half-witted, tobacco-eating white man speaking of every possessor of a skin darker than his own as a 'nigger.' Have you an extra revolver, Teecomo?"

"Of course, sir, since you told me this morning to bring you one."

"And rifles under us?"

Teecomo not only assented, but he quickly

handed the revolver in question to Mee-an-kah, and then drew out a couple of rifles which had been placed in the bottom of the carriage.

"I think I comprehend the drift of your questions, sir," he remarked, as he placed one of the rifles in the old chief's hands. "The Mormon bishop and his son are taking this direction, I suppose?"

"They may at least do so, since they'll naturally suppose we have gone in the direction of our mountain home," said Mee-an-kah.

"And if they do?" queried Teecomo.

"They must be dealt with as promptly as severely," declared Mee-an-kah. "Any pretense on their part of being our friends can only be regarded as a profanation. They are our deadly enemies, and will henceforth be treated as such. We will have nothing to say to them—nothing to do with them. They must let us alone and keep their distance!"

"No other course is possible," supplemented Monee.

Teecomo bowed assent to all these declarations.

"These being your sentiments, sir," he said, "I suppose your desire is to be driven home as directly as possible?"

"Naturally, Teecomo—naturally."

The young chief looked pleased.

His dark eyes glowed with a light as stern as tender, as they rested upon the face of his betrothed.

"And once there," he said, "woe to any one who seeks to harm us! Let intruders beware, especially if they are of the Bishop Ruddle stamp."

The old chief extended his hand and touched the arm of Teecomo, who drew rein in obedience to the hint thus given him, the carriage coming to a halt.

Then all listened.

The clatter of hoofs had arisen behind them, and was rapidly drawing nearer.

"As well settle the matter here," said Mee-an-kah, as his glances met the questioning gaze of Teecomo.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LINES DULY DRAWN.

THE wait proved a short one.

Smith Ruddle came thundering up, drawing rein abruptly near the carriage.

His aspect was furious, as he glared at the old chief, and then alternately and repeatedly at Monee and Teecomo.

"Can I do anything for you, Mr. Ruddle?" demanded Mee-an-kah, smilingly.

"Is anything amiss with you, young man?" smiled Monee.

"Are you in pursuit of anything in particular, stranger?" asked Teecomo.

If the responses of Smith were really intended for replies, they came far short of serving as such, since they were as incoherent as tempestuous.

He waited for his father, who was not long in appearing beside him.

"Stand at the heads of the horses, Smith," was the bishop's hurried injunction.

The son moved in that direction.

"Don't get too near those horses, stranger," warned Teecomo, as he quietly drew his rifle up into view, "and especially don't touch them, if your folks would prefer not to be put to the expenses of your funeral!"

The polished tones not only cut like a knife, but they were as significant as the click of a rifle.

Smith fell back promptly, with a keen realization of having struck a new sort of customer.

The bishop looked from his son to Teecomo, and then from Teecomo to the chief and Monee.

A change came over him.

The aspect of things was wholly glacial.

Between the actual state of affairs and what he had supposed it to be, was evidently a very wide difference.

As we have seen, he had always done justice to many of Mee-an-kah's qualities.

But he had regarded the old chief as too old and feeble to be taken into account as an adversary.

He changed his mind now, as he saw how handily Mee-an-kah balanced the rifle with which his prospective son-in-law had armed him.

"Are you riding after us, Bishop Ruddle?" demanded the chief.

"Yes—no—that is, I thought it very odd that you should take leave of us in such a manner," was the answer. "Who is this fellow?"

Mee-an-kah looked around slowly.

"I don't see any fellow," he answered.

"This man, then? This driver?"

"If his identity is any concern of yours, sir," returned Mee-an-kah, "you had better investigate it some time when he's at leisure. I wouldn't advise you to have much to say to him just at present."

The mien of Teecomo confirmed this suggestion.

In fact, he looked so uninviting that the last fragment of the ferocity with which the bishop had entered upon the pursuit suddenly evaporated.

He turned to Monee, riding nearer.

"Is this the way you keep your promise of remaining till to-morrow?" he asked.

"That promise, sir, was given, as promises usually are, upon certain conditions, either stated or understood," returned Monee. "When said conditions are violated, the promise is no longer binding."

"But what have I done that you should fly from my house at midnight?" queried Ruddle, trying to look grieved and injured.

"Would you really like to know what?" returned Monee, scornfully.

"I would, indeed."

"Then I'll simply ask you to describe the visit you and your son have just made to my father's room," said Monee. "Have the candor to relate all that was said and done."

The bishop stood as if paralyzed.

"I—I do not understand," he faltered.

"Perhaps your son can help you out, sir."

But Smith Ruddle looked even more consternated than his father at that mention of a "visit."

"It looks as if I were appealed to for this evidence," said Mee-an-kah, sternly. "In any case, I am willing to give the information demanded."

He quietly stated what had taken place in his room during the visit in question.

The effect of these revelations upon the two guilty conspirators can be imagined.

They were perfectly annihilated.

The only thing the bishop could think of was to give the miserable excuse he had suggested to his son, just before entering his guest's chamber. But the chief shook his head.

"That won't do," he declared. "Even if some such tale could cover what was done, it would not cover what was said. Have you forgotten the vile and infamous things that soiled your lips, while you thought I lay unconscious? Let me repeat some of them!"

He hastened to do so.

"All wrong, I agree," admitted the bishop, knowing that he could not repudiate what was said, "but all those words mean nothing. They are merely the vaporings of a thoughtless anger. They do not in the least negative the assertion I now make, namely, that I am your sincere friend."

"If you are, so much the better," returned the old chief. "But you'll excuse me for saying that we do not desire to have any further dealings with you!"

"Indeed! This is what I get, I suppose, for saving you from the clutches of those mountain outlaws!"

"If those 'mountain outlaws' are wholly creatures of your imagination, Bishop Ruddle—as we believe them to be—they will not do us any great harm," said Mee-an-kah. "And even if they were the worst cut-throats in the world, we'd sooner associate with them than with you!"

"You insult me, sir!"

"Then quietly ride out of hearing—as we shall now do, sir!"

The chief made a gesture to Teecomo, and the carriage resumed progress.

"We are done with you, bishop," added the old chief, with an energy that amounted to fierceness. "We hate and loathe you! If you ever intrude upon us again, you'll do so at your peril! Your vile schemes about rubies and lost mines have miscarried. I trust we shall never meet again, but if we do, take good care to meet us under such circumstances that you will not be shot at sight!"

And then all that was heard was the rumbling of the carriage.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A TREACHEROUS PATH.

THE sentiments of Sheriff Atwell and Detective Morgan, as they took leave of the Mormon bishop, after his lying interview with them, were considerably mixed.

"It seems to me that we have 'put our foot in it,' pard," observed the sheriff, as he reached the waiting carriage and sprang into it.

"Such things will happen," growled the detective, coolly, as he followed Mr. Atwell's example.

"Where to, sir?" asked the deputy, who was officiating as driver.

"Take us back to where the boys are waiting," ordered the sheriff.

The carriage wheeled and rolled away.

"And yet—Would you like to know my candid opinion, Mr. Atwell?" asked the detective, after a pause.

"Most certainly."

"Then I will say frankly that the bishop has simply 'lied us out of it!' The rig is really his. His whole deal with us, from the first word to the last, was a lie and a fraud. We can doubtless prove from some of the people living hereabouts, if we set about it, that these horses belong to him. Shall we try it?"

"I'd rather not," was the answer. "In the first place, most of the people hereabouts are probably Mormons, and in that case they would not say a word against their bishop. In the second place, we might spend the balance of the night in such an investigation, and not

arrive at the least result. And, finally, I am anxious to get back to camp. My idea is to secure a few hours' rest before we start for Echo with the prisoners."

The carriage soon arrived at a patch of open, in the midst of a considerable cluster of young pines.

Here the other deputies were in waiting as well as in hiding.

The firing of a shot was the signal agreed upon to call them to the bishop's, but there had been no occasion to make use of it.

"There's nothing to be done here, boys, it seems," announced Atwell to his men. "We'll take the back track, returning to the colonel's in about the order we came."

The men mounted, without comment or complaint, as was their wont.

"Or will you remain, Mr. Morgan?" added the sheriff, turning to his companion.

"I'll decide in a few minutes, was the detective's answer. "In any case, I have no objection to riding a short distance with you, while I reflect as to my course."

"Then we'll be off."

The party quietly got in motion.

Ere it had reached the road, however, a galloping horse was heard coming from the northward, and the sheriff touched the arm of his driver, and ordered him to draw rein.

Becoming motionless, the sheriff and his aids waited for the approaching horseman, who soon swept past on the road without a glance into the bushes which concealed them.

This horseman was of course Smith Ruddle, who was returning from a considerable jaunt, during which he had secured the letter of the colonel's daughter, as Smith had related to his father.

Ignorant of the glances bent upon him the horseman turned into a field and took his way by a short-cut toward Bishop Ruddle's dwelling.

"That must be the son," muttered Morgan, continuing to look after the retreating figure. "The temptation comes over me strong to follow him."

"Then do so," returned Atwell. "We can wait here, if you choose, to see what comes of the movement."

The detective alighted briskly.

"Wait a few minutes only," he rejoined. "If I am not back here inside of a quarter of an hour you will know that I have become interested in following my nose and will go back to the colonel's without me."

Gliding back to the road, which he crossed, he turned into the field at the very point where Smith Ruddle had turned into it.

But not without making a discovery which struck him as singular and suggestive.

He found that what appeared to be a length of ordinary post-and-rail fence was in reality a gate upon a pair of hinges.

"I see," muttered Morgan, as he felt of these hinges and placed his back to the horseman, striking a match and surveying the contrivance. "The real entrance to the bishop's is not at the house, but here!"

The fact interested him keenly, for it was a fact—and he resumed progress with new zeal and determination, following the path the horseman had taken and in which he was now passing out of sight.

No thought of danger occurred to the detective, and he did not experience the least trouble in following the horseman, so clearly was the path defined.

But suddenly, even as he was saying to himself what a good road he was following, the very earth seemed to give way beneath his feet, and he fell into a pit several yards in depth, with a great mass of earth, gravel and sand accompanying him and closing in upon him.

Even as he thus went down, he realized what had happened.

He had tumbled into a pitfall.

Very much such a pitfall as he had seen prepared for bears and other animals.

But that was not all.

As he reached the bottom, he landed upon a platform suspended from a number of pegs, and these in their turn put in motion a perfect shower of stones and clubs, which broke his left arm, cut open his head, and fairly griddled him with cuts and bruises.

As was natural, he uttered a wild cry of surprise as he descended into the pit, and it would be a little too much to ask of human nature to suppose that he stopped yelling after effecting such a landing.

He continued his shouts, without so much as a thought of the possibility that others than his friends might hear him.

Fortunately, he was still so near them that they heard his cries and hastened to his assistance.

"Why, what's up?" demanded Atwell, as he flashed the rays of a lantern into the pit.

"My arm's broken," returned Morgan, suppressing a groan of anguish. "Get ropes, and assist me out."

The task was neither easy nor short, but the sheriff and his men worked with a will, and in due course it was effected.

"Surely, a pitfall cannot have been set for a

bear in such a spot as this," declared Atwell, as he led the way toward the carriage.

"No," returned Morgan, who limped between two of the deputies, who gave him the support he needed, "it was set for me, or for any one like me. It shows how unscrupulously the bishop guards the approaches to his den. As to why that horseman did not fall into it, it is enough to say that he knew where it was, and took good care to go around it."

The carriage having been reached, Morgan was made as comfortable as possible, one of the deputies supporting his head and shoulders, while another rendered a similar service to his limbs, and in this way the party resumed their course anew for the colonel's.

"That old bishop ought to be killed for setting such a trap as that for visitors," declared one of the sympathetic deputies sternly. "Can nothing be done to him, Mr. Sheriff?"

"No, Martin," replied Atwell. "He would claim that a bear has been down repeatedly from the hills, following that very path, and has killed several of his pigs or other stock, and he might even point to a 'Notice' to this effect placarded to the gate or on one of the trees near it."

"But the trap is really set for two-legged intruders—for just such a visitor as Mr. Morgan, in fact," declared the deputy.

"There can be no doubt about that, of course," acknowledged Atwell. "This pit in the road is merely one feature of the old bishop's defense."

"But he could be made to pay damages," declared another deputy.

"That's true," confirmed the sheriff, "but what would such a suit amount to? Even if a verdict could be reached, the bishop would hardly be censured for such an attempt to save his pigs, and the damages would be assessed at such a figure that the plaintiff would be disgusted."

This view of the matter seemed to satisfy everybody, and the conversation was suspended.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A DISQUIETING SITUATION.

WHEN Colonel Hatton had finished the letters we left him writing, he opened the door between his library and the sitting-room.

He was struck by the strange silence which forced itself upon his attention.

A glance, and he stood as if petrified.

"Gone!" he ejaculated.

The fact was verified by the same glance which proclaimed it.

"How?" was then his query.

A few moments he stood observant and wondering, and then he hastened to call Bert, who in turn called Jonas and his sister.

The house and the surrounding grounds were searched as rapidly as silently, but not a trace was discovered of the direction in which Bullion Red and his pals had gone, or of the agency by which they had vanished.

"This is astounding!" exclaimed the colonel, as he stood upon his front steps, with the air of a man thoroughly bewildered. "Have none of you seen anything of an intruder?"

The answer was a general negative.

The bishop and Jerry, it will be remembered, had come and gone without being seen by any of the colonel's people.

"Well, if such things as this can be executed without even coming to my knowledge when I am in the next room," pursued the colonel, "we may as well all prepare to be murdered in our beds! This is the plumpest set-back we've had since the two camps came into existence."

Entering the house, he made all secure again, and then sent Jonas and Bert on a wider search, with orders to see if any of the miners in the camp had seen anything unusual, or had any suggestions to offer.

It was more than two hours before the couple returned, as barren of information as they had been at their departure.

Then followed another long wait, in the course of which the colonel, while lying on his lounge, with both Bert and Jonas on the watch, fell into a troubled slumber.

He was awakened by the return of Sheriff Atwell and his party, which of course included the disabled detective.

Explanations were briefly exchanged, while due attention was given to the broken arm of Morgan.

"From all this," said Colonel Hatton, "it would seem that Bishop Ruddle has especial reasons for guarding his house carefully. In other words, it is there that my wife is pining in an awful captivity."

His first act was to take a hundred men from the mining camp, and give the prisoners of the bishop a thorough overhauling.

Bert of course went with him.

All went disguised, but they were none the less armed, and none the less ready for a total extermination of all opposers.

The handsome villa of Ruddle was explored from cellar to garret, as was the stable, but not a trace of the missing lady was discovered.

It was long after daylight when the colonel

and Bert returned to their abode, with a gloom of the profoundest description.

They found that the sheriff and his posse had secured a few hours of repose, and were doing justice to an ample breakfast prepared by Nora, preparatory to going forth upon a renewed search for the fugitives.

"Of course our further search for Bullion Red and his pals must be to a very great extent a matter of guesswork," declared Sheriff Atwell, as he prepared to take his departure. "If the fugitives have found friends, or even a satisfactory hiding-place, they may remain for weeks within ten miles of us. But a more likely theory is that they will try to get out of the Ruby Valley and push on toward Utah. This has certainly been their objective point for several weeks."

"My fear is that you will not see them again at present, if ever, Mr. Atwell," said the colonel.

"Nevertheless I shall look for them, and at the same time search for Mrs. Hatton," returned the sheriff, "and it will be a cold day when I acknowledge myself beaten."

Left to himself, Colonel Hatton tried to hope that a letter would reach him in the course of the morning from his daughter.

Instead of a letter from Effie, however, the day's mail brought one to her.

This letter bore the postmark of the city where Effie had been staying, and it was addressed in the handwriting of the young lady whose guest Effie had been, two circumstances which showed that the colonel's daughter was supposed to be in Nevada.

How promptly the startled colonel took the liberty of breaking the seal and glancing at the contents of the epistle, need not be stated.

At his first glance, he uttered an awful cry, sinking helpless into a chair.

The letter took it for granted that Effie was now safe with her parents, and even fixed in an indirect way the date of her departure from Albany.

"Although you have been gone only twenty-four hours," began the letter, "I cannot resist the desire to write to you," etc.

A glance at the date of the letter, and the colonel was in possession of the necessary information.

"You see, Bert," he cried, with a deathly pallor, "Effie was due here yesterday! She left Albany twenty-four hours ahead of this letter."

Bert could not gainsay the conclusion.

He stood a moment as if paralyzed.

"Perhaps Miss Effie did not come as direct as the letter," he then suggested. "She may have stopped off at Chicago or elsewhere."

In the wild anguish of that moment, the colonel was only too willing to catch at this suggestion, which proved to be correct, as we shall see later.

"True," he returned. "She has a dear aunt in Chicago she has not seen for years, and who has often pressed her to make a visit. We must remember that she is not a prey to the same anxieties as ourselves. She doubtless believes that her mother arrived safely long ago, and is perfectly at ease about us. To rest over night, or a day or two, at her aunt's, would be perfectly natural."

"And such being the case, colonel, we may expect her at any moment," declared Bert, with forced enthusiasm. "There is no occasion to worry. She'll be here in the course of to-day or to-morrow."

Colonel Hatton had his doubts, but he did not care to express them.

"In any case, I cannot let the day pass, Bert, without another resolute attempt to get some trace of my wife's whereabouts. I must be stirring, or this anxiety will drive me mad. I'll leave you in charge here, and take a turn in the direction of Eureka."

"I may look for you to-night, of course?"

"Certainly. I may be a little late, if I get a clew, but I hardly dare hope for one, and in that case I will return in the evening stage from Summit to Huntington."

Bert shook his head thoughtfully.

"I hate to have you take such journeys alone, sir," he declared. "I feel as if a thousand hostile eyes were upon us, and am sure that the Mormons will move heaven and earth to get hold of you, after the visit we have just paid to Ruddle."

He reflected earnestly a few moments, while the colonel walked nervously to and fro, and then added:

"I'll watch the enemy while you are absent, and if it should be necessary for me to communicate with you while you are on the way home—say at the Choka Pass—I will intercept the stage by placing a log across the road. Should such an event take place, you will know that I am waiting in the bushes at the right-hand side of the road to speak to you, and you will find occasion to alight for a moment for that purpose."

"I comprehend, Bert. But keep a sharp lookout for your own safety. Remember that the ruffians at the other camp are quite as anxious to get hold of you as of me!"

A few further remarks were exchanged, with

a view to a complete understanding, and then the colonel rode away upon one of his best horses with the intention of riding the animal for all he was worth during the day and then leaving him in good care at some inn to be sent home later.

How sad and gloomy the colonel was at that moment need not be stated.

As a matter of fact, he scarcely doubted that Effie had already fallen into the hands of the enemy and that her situation was as bad as her mother's.

CHAPTER XXV.

A TERRIBLE DECEPTION.

HER face and eyes aglow with joyous expectancy, a fair young girl emerged in the early morning light from a sleeper on the Central Pacific Railroad at Wells Station, and bent a keen look of inquiry along the platform.

"Not here!" she murmured.

She was visibly disappointed at not seeing some one there to meet her.

A shadow appeared on her pure, sweet face.

"Miss Hatton, I believe?" questioned, with graceful bow and inclination, an almost boyish-looking personage who had stood in a waiting attitude at one corner of the small station building, scanning the newly-arrived passengers.

The maiden started, in pleased surprise, as her radiant eyes turned quickly upon the speaker, who had advanced hurriedly to meet her.

"Yes, I am Miss Hatton," was the answer, with just a shade of hesitation.

"Your father has sent me to meet you, Miss Hatton," resumed the young stranger, with another inclination, which was even more profound than before. "I hasten to say that he continues to improve, and that he is comfortable and all right, but his physicians did not like to take the responsibility of his making the early morning journey required to meet you."

The young girl bowed understandingly, but a singular look of disappointment had traversed her face with the celerity of lightning, as she gave a rapid glance to a survey of the face and form before her.

Evidently, if we may interpret that look, the girl was not only disappointed by the absence of her father, but by the aspect of the colonel's representative.

"You—you are Mr. Tabor, who has been so kind to us, I suppose?" she said, with forced enthusiasm.

"No, I'm sorry to say, Miss Hatton," and the speaker banished from the corners of his mouth a disagreeable expression which had involuntarily invaded them. "I'm not Mr. Tabor!"

The fair young face brightened, and a barely audible sigh of relief could have been heard from under the light veil the maiden drew promptly over her features.

It was evidently a genuine relief for her to be assured that the peculiar type of countenance before her did not belong to Albert Tabor.

Most assuredly, it was not the ideal face which had for several weeks haunted her thoughts.

"Mr. Tabor could not come," added the young stranger. "At the last moment, the colonel felt that he could not spare him."

The maiden's face grew brighter, as if she realized that her loss was her father's gain.

"And so I was sent in his place," added the unknown, a little nervously, as if he realized the unfavorable impression he had made and was making, and was even afraid that the next proceeding of Miss Hatton would be to ask him for credentials. "My name is Arthur Coverly. Perhaps I am not presuming in calling myself your father's best friend, next to Mr. Tabor."

There was just a shade of suspicion in the glances bent upon him.

"Did—did my father send a line by you, Mr. Coverly?" trembled upon her lips.

To say the least, the countenance of Mr. Coverly was not prepossessing, and it had visibly inspired her with sentiments of uneasiness and with an undefined mistrust.

Before she could give expression to this feeling, however, Coverly produced a letter from a side-pocket, and added:

"The colonel said that the possession of this letter—your own, of latest date, Miss Hatton—would be a sufficient introduction for me, as also a sufficient proof of my good faith. I certainly hope," and the speaker forced a smile, "that you will regard me as authentic!"

"Why, certainly, Mr. Coverly," and Effie Hatton flushed brightly, with a sort of self-reproach for her undefined misgivings. "If papa trusts you, especially to that extent," and she glanced at the letter she had waved back to its possessor, "you may be sure that I shall not do less, sir."

The train was now moving, and Coverly led the way several steps further from it.

"Of course I have a private carriage in waiting," he said, "and if you will take a seat in it and give me your checks, we'll soon be off for the camp."

Bowing assent, Effie handed her checks to Coverly, at the same time moving toward the waiting carriage.

Her uneasiness returned a moment, as she

sat awaiting her baggage, for the driver of Mr. Coverly seemed even more ill-favored than his master, but the maiden thrust it resolutely from her.

"I suppose I am disappointed because Mr. Tabor did not come for me," she said to herself, "and that's why everybody looks to me like an escaped jail-bird. I must keep down these foolish fancies, and at least try to be civil. These men are doubtless all right, or papa would not have sent them for me."

The baggage was soon secured, and Coverly sprung into the carriage, excusing himself for the delay, and the party rolled swiftly away from the station.

"A fine morning for a ride, is it not, Mr. Coverly?" observed Effie, giving effect to her resolve to be civil. "Somehow I find this light and dry air exhilarating. It is certainly very unlike the heavy atmosphere of the sea-level where my life has been chiefly spent. We're almost in a mountainous country here, are we not, sir?"

"Almost," answered Coverly, as he blossomed out into his best form and color under the witching radiance of his companion. "All Nevada is one vast plateau, about four thousand feet above the sea, which is traversed every fifty miles or so, by ranges of mountains which are more or less parallel, and which tower aloft, in places, three or four thousand feet more. This one on our right, as we ride southward, is known as the Humboldt Range, while that little elevation on our left is the Cedar Mountain."

"That latter name would seem to indicate that Nevada is a wooded country," observed Effie.

"And so it is naturally, but the wooded interest has been greatly neglected and abused," declared Coverly, who was visibly fascinated by his charming young companion. "You must have heard your father say, Miss Hatton, what magnificent forests there were in Nevada when he first traversed the country."

"I have indeed."

"But greedy men, in those early days, hastened to saw down whole forests, without taking any steps to replace them, and the result is that Nevada is now cursed with immense deserts of wholly human origin, so to speak. But we hope to have forestry laws in force soon, and then there will be a change for the better."

Indicating with a graceful bow her thanks for the information, Effie looked away into the great hills and along the wide valleys, with a kindling eye, while her fair cheeks grew more radiant with the zephyrs which expanded her lungs and quickened her breathing.

"You mentioned that papa continues to get stronger," she said, again turning her glances upon Coverly, after a brief pause. "How is my mother?"

"Quite well, Miss Hatton—quite! In fact, she has become a great admirer of her new surroundings, and declares that she is taking a new lease of life every day."

Effie heaved a sigh of relief.

"She had a pleasant journey westward, Mr. Coverly, so far as you have heard?" she asked, with keen interest.

"The best in the world, save for certain anxieties about her husband," assured Coverly, who seemed to pass every moment more and more under the spell thrown upon him by the fair traveler beside him. "If my judgment is worth anything, you will find her greatly improved by the journey hither and her residence among us. I almost envy you, Miss Hatton, I'm sure, the charming reunion to which you are hastening!"

Again Effie bowed her acknowledgments.

"Of course I hardly need ask you if you have had a pleasant trip from the East," added Coverly, with smiling loquacity. "The very glow upon your cheeks is enough to prove that it has passed like a delicious dream!"

"It has certainly been a pleasant journey, despite certain anxieties," to borrow a phrase of yours, Mr. Coverly. How long shall we be in reaching the camp, do you think? I understood the distance is quite a long one."

"And so it is, Miss Hatton, but it will be quickly accomplished, with such horses as I am accustomed to using."

"I had noticed that they step off with wonderful vigor. Would it have been better for me to have left the train at Elko?"

"No, to the contrary. Elko is nearer our camp than Wells, but it has the disadvantage of being on the other side of the Humboldt Range, and that would have forced you to take a disagreeable ride through the mountains or around them."

"I am glad to hear that I have taken the right course, sir," said Effie. "I hardly knew how to choose between Wells and Elko, but I knew my letter would make it plain to papa where to look for me, and that I should go quite right," and she smiled, "even if I went wrong."

"Perhaps you would like to doze a little by the way, after such wakefulness as one is apt to have in a sleeper?" suggested Coverly. "If so, I will put up the top of the carriage, and transfer myself to a place beside the driver!"

"Oh, many thanks, Mr. Coverly," returned

Effie, "but there is no occasion to trouble yourself. I am not at all sleepy. I rest as well in a sleeper as anywhere. Besides, my thoughts are too busy to admit of slumber!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE WOLF AND THE LAMB.

ANOTHER interval of silence succeeded.

However busy may have been the thoughts of Effie Hatton, they were far less active than those of the man who had constituted himself her traveling companion.

It is hardly necessary to say that "Mr. Coverly" was merely a name Smith Ruddle had assumed for this occasion.

But he already felt that he could gladly retain it forever, abandoning all others, if he could only induce Effie Hatton to wear it.

Language fails to do justice to the violence of his infatuation from the first moment his gaze rested upon her.

"Papa is in his new house, of course?" suddenly resumed Effie, as she again turned to her escort from the contemplation of the pleasant landscapes around, as revealed under the radiance of the new day.

"Oh, yes. It has been several weeks, I think, since he exchanged his tent in the camp for it."

"Mr. Tabor still makes his home with papa?"

The recurrence of Bert's name seemed to affect the hearer disagreeably, but he mastered himself promptly and replied in the affirmative.

"And Nora and her brother are still there?"

"Naturally."

"Then the new house must seem quite like home already to mamma. Does she go riding every day with papa?"

"Almost."

"Of course Mr. Tabor always goes with them," pursued Effie, with a preoccupation which caused her to fail to see the involuntary grimace this further reference to our hero called to the Coverly countenance. "I wrote him to never, never let papa out of his sight, or at least to always consider himself responsible to me for papa's safekeeping."

"No doubt Mr. Tabor will respond to the trust reposed in him," said Coverly, as his hands balled themselves without his being conscious of the fact. "He would be heedless, indeed, not to obey your slightest injunction."

"The truth is," added Effie, who did not even notice the compliment implied in the latest remark of her escort, "I have been worried about papa more than he knows. Those Mormon reptiles seem determined to kill him."

The particular "Mormon reptile" who sat beside the girl at that moment was adequate to the requirements of the occasion.

"All danger of that is now past," he assured. "As much as some of those men would like to harm the colonel, Albert Tabor has scared them out completely. They are as afraid of him as if he were a tiger."

Effie's face glowed like the sun and she looked as if she had received a personal compliment of the most gratifying nature.

"You must see a great deal of Mr. Tabor," she said, with a kinder glance than she had before bestowed upon her escort. "Do you like him?"

"Like him? We are like brothers!"

"I am glad to hear those Mormon cut-throats have been taught to respect him," said Effie. "To think of the pain and suffering they have caused poor papa! I hope the villain who shot him will be discovered and sent to prison for a long term of years. I suppose we are not in danger of encountering any of them in the course of this journey?"

"Oh, no."

"And yet their camp is directly between us and Ruby Lake, is it not, sir?"

"Certainly, Miss Hatton, but we shall pass to the eastward of Franklin Lake, so as to have this body of water between us and these 'reptiles,' as you call them. We shall not even see them."

"You are armed, of course, Mr. Coverly?"

"Oh, yes," and Coverly smiled. "It's one of the customs of the country."

"I thought as much," said Effie, "and so I have not hesitated to conform to it."

"Ah! you are armed?"

"Yes," and Effie drew her handbag nearer.

"I've not only supplied myself with a revolver for this journey, but I know how to use it."

"Good!" commented Coverly. "There'll be three of us to resist the 'Sons of Thunder,' if they should dare molest us."

Then he looked far away into the hills and plains around him, and whispered within his black heart and brain:

"My gentle innocent is booked for a rude awakening!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

HARD TIMES IN THE MOUNTAINS.

WITH his faultless white apron adorning his capacious front, and his bald head glistening with saponaceous proof of cleanliness, Landlord Crippitt, of the Pass-no-pass Tavern, was the beau ideal of a boniface, as he waddled heavily

from his dining-room along the broad hall to the front door of his hospitable mansion.

And yet Mr. Crippitt was not happy.

So far indeed was Mr. Crippitt from that enviable state of mind, that his countenance, as he proceeded to look searchingly in every direction from his door, was as black and agitated as the stormiest of disgust and discouragement could make it.

The reason of this state of things can be told by us far easier than even the most attentive reader can guess it.

Look where he would, Landlord Crippitt could not detect the least promise of having a guest to breakfast.

Unless he chose to look upon himself in that capacity.

In which he certainly had some claims, not having missed a meal in five and thirty years.

But the awful fear had now dawned upon him that he would be forced at an early day to go hungry.

And not only had this fear dawned, but it kept dawning anew with every rising sun, until the worthy landlord had really begun to lose flesh by anticipation.

To go hungry for the want of something to feed—this was indeed a situation as melancholy as paradoxical.

To have a house full of beds in which nobody slept was justly a matter for wakefulness.

Not a horseman to the right; not a foot passenger to the left; not even a tramp to ask for free supplies—such seemed the actuality of the present and the promise of the future.

Landlord Crippitt grew so pensive at these reflections, and the reflections which these reflections suggested, that he became utterly oblivious for the moment of his surroundings.

As was inevitable, therefore, he started as if shot as his cook, chambermaid, clerk, errand-boy, hostler, night watchman, table-waiter, bar-keeper, and the various other members of his staff came skurrying around from the rear of the Pass-no-pass Tavern with the air of having forgotten something of the greatest importance.

Fortunately, all these personages made only one, when pinned down to actual count, and that one answered to the name of Conn, a slab-sided, tow-headed stripling, who generally presented himself to the guests of the Pass-no-pass Tavern—when guests there were—as the stable-boy and hostler.

"Sorry, sir," blustered Conn, flourishing a carrycomb in one hand and a brush in the other, his error of omission having dawned upon him as he was in the act of using those implements, "but I forgot to say that Smith Ruddle's gone to Wells with a carriage and two horses for a passenger, and that we shall be likely to have 'em for breakfast—if I run out and stop 'em!"

Landlord Crippitt started so violently that a pain traversed his whole corporosity, and he had to lean temporarily upon the rail of his veranda.

A guest to breakfast!

It was "too good to be true," and a sober second thought came to check the landlord's ill-timed and excessive rejoicings.

"But how 'stop 'em,' Conn?" he asked, with a feeling of yearning interest as well as of helpless dependence that was touching. "Smith Ruddle has never taken a meal here yet, although he has run to and fro enough to wear a rut bigger'n the Grand Canyon of the Colorado! Is it likely that he'll stop now? We can't tell him to 'come in and eat or die,' can we?"

"We can get him all the same, sir," assured Conn cheerfully, illustrating with his brush and comb how easily the objects of his solicitude could be drawn into the fold. "In the first place, I s'pose you've no objection to getting breakfast on the chance of finding some one to eat it?"

"Let's see, Conn—how many is there likely to be in the party?" asked Crippitt reflectively.

"Well, there's Smith and at least one passenger, sir, and then there's the driver—four in all, sir."

"Four? I count only three!"

"That's because you count wrong, Mr. Crippitt," said Conn. "That driver is Raw-boned Davy, who's never counted less than two by those who know him when it's a question of eating or drinking. Four, sir."

The landlord accepted the amendment.

"All right, Conn," he declared. "We'll prepare breakfast for four, and take our chances. If our guests fail to arrive, we can eat it ourselves—in the course of the day. But tell me how you propose to intercept young Ruddle and his party."

"I can't exactly say, sir, as I've not given the matter due attention, but there are several hundred ways of doing it, so that I need only choose the most available."

"Several hundred?" repeated Crippitt. "Let's have a few specimens."

"Well, I can be hunting half a mile north o' here, at the right moment, and pepper one of the horses with bird-shot, so that the pair'd run away—"

"But that might kill the passengers."

"Perhaps, sir, but we could charge the breakfast to their heirs. There is a better way, how-

ever. I can stop Smith and tell him that you have fallen into the cellar and broken your leg, and that I want him to help me to get you to bed—"

"But the sham would be detected, Conn, and it would be seen that you were lying."

"Nothing of the sort, sir. My story would be regarded as the very natural exaggeration of my fears, and the party would rejoice with us, and remain to breakfast."

The landlord shook his head slowly and regretfully.

"You have too much leisure of late, I see, Conn," he said. "You read too many of those novels. Why, you are getting to talk like any of the chaps in those books. Your ideas are too fanciful and romantic. Try to think of something more practical and realistic."

"All right, sir. Listen!" exclaimed Conn, striking an attitude worthy of one of his favorite heroes. "What I really propose to do is this. I will meet Smith Ruddle this side of the Butte, raise my forefinger warningly—so! Of course he'll stop instant. Then I'll tell him that seventeen men from the Gentile camp are waiting for him and his party just the other side of the Two Springs, and he'll be struck all in a heap. 'What am I to do, Conn?' he'll ask, for he knows who I am and where I live. 'What you are to do, sir,' I shall reply, 'Is to follow me in silence!' 'All right, Conn,' says he. 'Save us, and you shall be well paid!' 'I don't need to be paid for doing my duty, sir,' I shall say as grand as you please. 'Caution, sir! Keep close to me!' And thereupon I shall take Smith and his party to the house, and the horses and carriage to the stable, and I shall keep 'em here all day, Mr. Crippitt, what with my goings and comings and reports about the hidden Gentiles, and I shall make Smith pay at least ten dollars for his keep, and at least ten more for being rescued from his enemies. See?"

The approving smile of the landlord had deepened with every word of this graphic exposition.

"By the great pewter spoon!" he cried, his face beaming with delight, "if you're not a genius, Conn, may I never again be able to charge any man twice for the same dinner!"

"You think, then, Mr. Crippitt," queried Conn, complacently, "that this plan'll fetch 'em?"

"Fetch 'em?" echoed the landlord. "Smith Ruddle would have to be more of a blockhead than a wooden Injun if he didn't tumble to your proposition quicker'n greased lightning could climb a hickory. Why, those Gentiles and Mormons are always fighting, are they not?"

"Yes, sir. That's just what's the matter," explained Conn. "For months past those two rival camps on the lakes have not been able to pass a single day without a scrimmage, and Smith'll think that some of his enemies have seen him ride away alone to the north'ard, and that they propose to improve the occasion thus afforded them to do him up."

Landlord Crippitt glanced at his watch and assumed his most bustling air.

"There's time to act," he said, "but not a moment to lose. To be on the safe side, you had better be moving toward the Butte."

Conn bowed assent to the suggestion, and hastened to take his departure, after the exchange of a few final suggestions.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HOW THE PLAN WORKED.

AS was simply inevitable under the circumstances, the pauses in the conversation of Smith Ruddle with Effie Hatton had lengthened with every repetition, until it could almost have been said that silence reigned between them.

With the best of intentions toward her new acquaintance, Effie could not help wondering how a man with Smith Ruddle's ear-marks could ever have become the friend and trusted associate of Colonel Hatton and Bert Tabor.

As much as she had struggled against the sentiment, she was not long in conceiving such an aversion to him, and even such a positive mistrust of him, that she would have given a handsome sum to reach the Gentile camp without the infliction of his presence.

As to Smith, he was too excited with his wild hopes and schemes to carry on a conversation which had quickly been exhausted of all subjects of mutual interest.

Absorbed in his plans for the future, he was giving very little attention to his surroundings, when he saw Conn emerging from a thicket by the wayside with a celerity and an air of mystery which were quite sufficient in themselves to have fixed attention.

The youth was a picture.

He not only seemed breathless, as if exhausted with running, but he was hatless, and his garments were torn and frayed, while his face was streaked with blood.

His *tout ensemble*, in short, had been well designed to represent a hurried flight through the underbrush, and it's only fair to add that Conn had made a success of it.

Clearly enough, he had not read in vain the novels to which the worthy boniface had alluded.

The very aspect of the fellow was enough to have given Smith Ruddle a start at such a moment.

The raised forefinger and a warning "sh!" did the rest, as Rawboned Davy drew rein.

"What is it, my good fellow?" asked Smith, as he roused up nervously.

"I have something to say to you, sir," returned Conn. "Very important!"

"Well, say it!"

"Must see you in private, sir," declared Conn, as the raised forefinger suddenly became deflected enough to indicate the covert in which he had been waiting the young Mormon's arrival. "I ask the same only out of regard for the young lady," and the glances of the speaker rested wonderingly a moment on the fair young face of our heroine. "I might scare her!"

Smith remembered that he was sailing under false colors with Effie, and he was only too glad to avail himself of the youth's suggestion.

"Excuse me a moment, Miss Hatton," said he, turning to the girl, with all his previous deference and politeness. "The matter can be of no consequence, but I may as well see what the fellow has to say to me."

He hastened to follow Conn, who had already regained his place of concealment.

"Of course you know me, sir?" resumed the youth, in a low tone, when Smith had joined him.

Smith bestowed upon the questioner a sharper glance than he had previously given him.

"Ah, yes," he acknowledged. "You are the boy who lives at the Pass-no-pass Tavern."

Conn assented with grave dignity, adding:

"You've never so much as given us a call, sir, let alone a good breakfast or dinner, but I have seen you pass so often that I know who you are. Your name is Smith Ruddle?"

Smith started, looking around quickly.

"Hush!" he enjoined. "Don't mention my name here. What have you to say to me?"

"Simply that the boys of that rival camp are waiting to waylay you the other side of the Two Springs, sir!"

Smith started still more violently.

"Waiting for me?" he ejaculated. "Who?"

"Colonel Hatton and his men."

If Conn had known all that is known to the reader he could not have possibly hit upon five words which would have caused greater consternation in Smith Ruddle's soul than the five upon which he had thus stumbled.

Smith flushed hotly and then became as pale as startled.

"You saw them, Conn?" he queried.

Conn nodded.

"And counted them?"

"I left off when I had counted seventeen, sir!"

"And Colonel Hatton is at their head?"

Another nod.

"Ah! I see!"

As was only natural, the villain leaped to the worst conclusions.

Colonel Hatton had seen him riding toward Wells to intercept Effie, or had in some other way got wind of the proposed abduction, and had laid his plans to inflict speedy and condign punishment.

"You know just what this all means, sir?" asked Conn, as he watched the changing countenance before him.

"Perfectly, my boy," returned Smith. "You have saved my life, Conn! I shall never forget it! What do you advise? For me to turn off toward Fort Halleck?"

"Oh, no, sir! That won't do. I saw a picket of soldiers going into the Humboldt Pass, and have no doubt they are watching for you in that direction."

Smith flushed again.

The battle was hotter than he had thought.

"Give me an idea, Conn," he said, hurriedly, "as to what you would do in my place."

"There's only one way of saving you, sir, if I may speak my mind," assured Conn. "You must come with me to the Tavern and tie up so snug that every trace of you will be lost. After breakfast, or an hour or two hence, I'll ride out toward the Two Springs, as if I were looking for a strayed mule. Colonel Hatton will naturally ask me if I have seen you, and I shall tell him that you have gone to your new house on the other side of Snow Lake, in the Clover Valley. Then the colonel and his men'll ride in that direction, and you'll be able to go where you like."

Smith Ruddle was delighted.

"So be it," he said. "I will take refuge with you at the tavern. But mind you, Conn! Not a word of all this to the young lady! Don't mention my name to her. There is no occasion to worry her with things which concern only you and myself. Give a hint to this effect to your master!"

"All right, sir. Keep an eye on me, and do as I do. There's a lane some distance this side of the tavern which leads to the stable by a back way, and if we take this route there will be no fresh tracks to betray us!"

"I understand, Conn," said Smith. "Lead on as fast as you like."

The youth turned his steps homeward, while Smith Ruddle returned to the carriage.

"There is some danger, then?—some trouble?" asked Effie, as she scanned the perturbed countenance of her escort.

"There is, I am sorry to say, Miss Hatton," answered Smith, as he took his place beside the girl, and ordered Davy by a gesture to follow the stable-boy. "A party of those infernal Mormons have hidden beside the road, a couple of miles further on, with the intention of way-laying us. In fact, they intend to kill me and carry you off to the mountains!"

Effie paled at these declarations, as well she might.

"They must have seen you going to the station," she murmured. "What a situation to be placed in! These men are between us and the camp?"

"Directly in our path!"

"Then what are we to do? Can't we turn their hiding-place, and arrive by some other route?"

"I have arranged a better plan. You noticed that poor, half-witted lad, who has torn his face and clothes to pieces coming through the bushes to warn me? I had the good fortune to save his life not long ago. He was drowning in one of our lakes, when I plunged in and drew him out. Full of gratitude for that benefit, he has now taken all this risk and trouble to meet me and tell me about these hidden Gentiles—"

"Gentiles!" echoed Effie, with a start. "Of course you mean *Mormons*?"

"Exactly! Did I say Gentiles? How stupid of me! To come to the gist of the matter, we have only to wait a little while at the tavern where this chap is a hostler, and we can then resume our journey in peace and safety. We shall be delayed barely long enough to have a good breakfast."

"Are you sure, Mr. Coverly, that this plan will work safely and expeditiously?"

"Oh, quite sure, Miss Hatton."

Our heroine inclined her head, with the air of one who has nothing more to say, and the carriage rolled on to the Pass-no-pass Tavern without further observation.

CHAPTER XXIX.

FROM FICTION TO FACT.

THE Pass-no-pass Tavern stood—and still stands, for that matter—at the east entrance of the Humboldt Pass, on the Camp Halleck Military Reservation, at a point where an east and west road crosses the one leading from Wells Station toward the lakes.

It had been built by an ex-sutler named Mouser, who was an unmitigated scamp.

Having arrived at the Humboldt Pass ahead of the general public, he had built a high fence across the trail at a difficult point, claiming to be the owner of all the land roundabout by virtue of a treaty with the Indians, and had set himself to levying toll upon every one who wished to traverse the pass.

Most people paid the said toll under protest—but they none the less paid it, rather than spend twenty-four hours in removing the obstacles with which the road bristled.

A few went for Mr. Mouser with their shooting-irons so vigorously that he was glad to let them pass free to get rid of them.

The grand result of all these piracies, after a term of years, was that Mr. Mouser had become wealthy.

Having plenty of money, he proceeded to build a goodly inn at the Four Corners where he had so long played the robber.

And this was not all.

This man of sin had the cheek to perpetuate the memory of his frauds and rapacities by calling the place the Pass-no-pass Tavern.

It is pleasant to read, in the annals from which we glean these particulars, that Mr. Mouser finally encountered a worse reptile than himself—a rattlesnake, with twelve rattles, which set about collecting toll of him.

In other words, bit him.

Curious to relate, Mr. Mouser had abused whisky in health to such an extent that it was of no use to him in disease, or in such an emergency as had thus dawned upon him, and so he died.

His daughter succeeded him as the proprietor of the premises, and she became in due course the wife of Mr. Crippitt, who in his turn succeeded to her.

The moving cause of her departure, however, was not a snake-bite, but a commercial traveler.

If the deserted husband ever mourned his faithless spouse, no microscope has ever been seen powerful enough to focus the least evidence of that sorrow.

He lived the jolliest life imaginable, and accumulated flesh so rapidly that he was soon in danger of dying under the burden.

But an evil hour had long since dawned.

With the advent of railroads the old emigrant trail had ceased to be used, and Mr. Crippitt had become nearly as much isolated as a Crusoe on his island.

A little local traffic did indeed pass his door, but not much of it halted long enough to provoke a distribution of the metallic substances for which Crippitt's palms were itching.

In this way had dawned the state of affairs

which had induced Crippitt to join Conn in his conspiracy to entrap a guest to breakfast.

Of course the landlord had watched the proceedings of his factotum from a second-story window, and had smiled at Conn's triumph with a smile as graphic as the Commentaries of Julius Caesar.

"Good!" he growled, triumphantly. "The fellow is justly entrapped! He shall not only pay now for what he has to-day, but also for what he might have had months ago!"

Little doubting Conn's success, Crippitt had made coffee and gotten all his culinary affairs into an advanced state, so that he was able to present himself to the gaze of his guests with his wonted dignity and equanimity.

"Not a word about *their* affairs," enjoined Conn, who had gained the presence of his chief before the guests had fairly alighted in the back yard. "You are not to seem to know Mr. Ruddle. He wants to keep the young lady ignorant of the danger!"

"I understand," returned Crippitt. "Mum's the word about everything except breakfast."

We need not pause upon the reception of the guests and their installation in the dining-room.

Conn and his master had learned to work in such harmony, that no guest ever left the hotel under the impression that there was a lack of waiters or chambermaids, the numerous calls of the conspirators for "Jane," "Martha," "Tom," etc., serving to keep up the impression that a large number of servants were near at hand, even if they never became actually visible.

The ride had made Smith Ruddle hungry, and he set about doing ample justice to the good cheer before him, relying upon the repeated assurances of Conn that no harm whatever should befall him.

As to Effie, she conformed quietly to the suggestions of her escort, and even had the appearance of enjoying her breakfast and of giving very little attention to her surroundings, but she was nevertheless keenly observant, and had already noted a number of circumstances which she had mentally labeled as suspicious.

It seemed a singular slip of the tongue for Smith Ruddle to say Gentiles when he meant Mormons, and the constrained air of her escort and Crippitt, as a few words passed secretly between them, was singularly suggestive.

In fact, she promptly realized that some game was in progress, although the hands of the players were still a mystery.

Piloting the horses and their driver into the stable, Conn had closed the doors, and then came into the dining-room, donning a white apron, to wait upon the guests, which he proceeded to do with tact and promptness, giving especial attention to Effie.

He was as much struck by her beauty and grace as surprised to find her traveling in the company of Smith Ruddle.

"Who can she be?" he asked himself. "Evidently some one who is ignorant of his real character, or she'd know his name. Perhaps he's deceiving her. Perhaps he intends to make a wife of her."

Conn resolved to know more.

If such a state of things existed as he vaguely divined, he could make more out of the morning's labors than the price of a meal or two, and he would, too—certain!

His ideas soon took shape.

Fortune also favored him.

An old horse which had been left loose on the Pass road suddenly came clattering toward the inn, either because it had been drawn thitherward by the unusual attraction of hearing other horses at the stable, or because some prowling coyote or other animal had startled it.

Of course Smith Ruddle arose, as promptly as unceremoniously, at that suspicious sound, and crossed the floor rapidly to the window, looking out.

Conn did not neglect the opportunity thus afforded him of privately addressing a few words to the object of his curiosity and cupidity.

"The danger is real, miss, but it is for you alone," he whispered. "You had best see me in the master's room. Excuse yourself to that man, and tell me you desire to wash your hands!"

It was all he had a chance to say.

Smith Ruddle had realized that there was no occasion for alarm, and had turned back to his seat at the table.

"Excuse me a moment, Mr. Coverly," observed Effie, arising as Ruddle sat down. "I must wash this dust from my hands."

The proposition was not a pleasant one for Smith, inasmuch as he did not wish to lose sight of Effie, and he bestirred himself to think of some way of turning it.

"I'd like to wash mine, too," he said, as he gained his feet briskly, noticing the conscious and expectant air of the stable-boy. "Lead on, Conn!"

The order was obeyed with the best grace possible, but the proceeding did not help Smith with Effie, who looked upon his act as either inconsiderate or suspicious.

Reaching Mr. Crippitt's sleeping apartment, Conn poured some water from a pail into a

washbowl, and motioned Smith Ruddle toward it.

"As to you, miss," he said, with a secret glance of intelligence, "you had better see the chambermaid or housekeeper, who are roomed here," and he stepped across a hall and opened the door of a second apartment.

"Thanks. I will do so," returned Effie, following Conn. "You'll excuse me a moment, Mr. Coverly, waiting for me in the dining-room, if you will be so kind."

In another moment she had vanished, and Conn had vanished with her, the door closing behind them.

CHAPTER XXX.

MR. COVERLY UNCOVERED.

THE look Effie noticed on her escort's face, at the instant of withdrawing her glances from it, was in itself a revelation.

It was the look of a man who suddenly finds himself slipping upon a dangerous declivity.

She realized that he did not want to trust her out of his sight, but that, on the other hand, he shrunk from offering any opposition to her temporary withdrawal.

By this time she was keenly anxious to hear what Conn had to say, if not actually suspicious.

As to Conn himself, his whole countenance had become an interrogation point.

"Of course there's no chambermaid here," he said, in a whisper, as he turned the key in the lock of the door and led the way across the room to an open window. "That allusion to a chambermaid or housekeeper," and he nodded toward Ruddle, "was for *his* benefit!"

"I so understood it," returned Effie, whose fair face was glowing anew with excitement. "And now what is the peril to which you alluded?"

Conn hesitated about answering, but merely because he was asking himself how he should get at it.

"Of course I will pay you well for any information or assistance," said Effie, producing her purse and drawing a crisp ten-dollar greenback from it. "Take this, please!"

Conn refused energetically.

If he had entered upon this business from cupidity, he was none the less acting now from motives which did him credit.

The girl's beauty and grace, her very helplessness—so to speak—had put to flight the motives and aims which had influenced Conn earlier in the morning, and he would now have gladly risked his life to serve her, without any other reward than her approving smiles.

"I do not need money," he said, with an air evidently borrowed from one of his favorite heroes. "What I desire to do is to clear up the mystery between you and this man," and once more he nodded and gesticulated in the direction of the girl's escort. "To begin with, why do you call him Mr. Coverly?"

"Is not that his name?"

"No, miss—nothing of the sort!"

"He at least told me that his name is Arthur Coverly," said Effie, hurriedly. "He said he had saved your life—"

"My life, miss?"

"Yes. You were drowning in some lake, and he plunged in to save you!"

Conn laughed scornfully, but without forgetting the presence of Smith Ruddle in the adjacent apartment.

"He save me from drowning?" he sneered. "Why, there isn't a lake in all Nevada big enough to drown me! I can swim like a fish!"

"Then you didn't come to meet this man out of gratitude?"

"Gratitude? I came to meet him because the Fourth of July's soon coming, and I want a little change to buy fire-crackers and rockets! Old Crippitt hasn't paid me a cent in four months, and I doubt if we've served three square meals to the traveling public in as many weeks!"

"And this is why you come to warn us of the danger?"

"Danger? The only danger in the case, miss, is what you are incurring in being in this man's company."

"Then how about those Mormons waiting by the roadside, a couple of miles further on?" demanded Effie.

"Mormons? Who said a word about Mormons? I didn't! What I said was Gentiles!"

"Gentiles!" echoed Effie, looking bewildered, as well as excited. "Are the men waiting to murder us Gentiles?"

"There's nobody waiting, miss—neither Gentiles nor Mormons!" declared Conn, roundly. "Don't you see the point, miss? What I wanted, was to get you here to breakfast, so that Mr. Crippitt would be able to pay me a trifle on account. There's nobody in ambush—nobody whatever. The story of the seventeen men in waiting was invented to get you here to breakfast, so that the old man and I could be in funds again!"

Effie comprehended now, as was evident by the amused smile which chased the anxious and worried look from her face.

"Of course you shall have your rockets and

fire-crackers," she said, as she again tendered Conn the greenback mentioned. "I will not allow you to refuse this trifle, after the explanations you have given me. Take it! I give it to you because I am your friend, Conn—for that's your name, I believe—and because I am ever, ever so much obliged to you for the information you have given me!"

Conn saw, by the gentle hand upon his arm, and by the eloquent eyes looking into his own, that the moment had come to sacrifice all his grandiloquent phrases about duty and devotion for a small sum in ready cash, and he hastened thankfully to stow away the ten-dollar greenback in his innermost pocket.

"And now for another answer or two to my questions, Conn," said Effie, with a smile which would have led the delighted youth through fire and water for her sake. "You say this man's name is not Coverly. Will you tell me who he really is?"

"He's Smith Ruddle, miss!"

"Ruddle?" repeated Effie, restraining her surprise. "Not the bishop?"

"No, miss, but the bishop's son—all Mormons, of course, and this fellow, as young as he is, has four or five wives already."

At this instant, a cry of rage and consternation resounded the other side of the keyhole, and Smith Ruddle burst into the room—literally burst in, bringing the door from its hinges—and gathered himself up, pale and enraged, within a few feet of Conn and Effie, glaring from one to the other.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A GOOD ENTERING WEDGE.

BOTH Effie and Conn comprehended at a glance what had happened.

Smith Ruddle had verified the old adage that listeners never hear any good of themselves.

In other terms he had overheard the declarations of the stable-boy concerning him.

"Rascal! did I not tell you to keep my name a secret from this young lady?" he thundered.

"Perhaps you did, sir," returned Conn coolly, he being strengthened by a glimpse of his master, who was approaching to see who was tearing the house to pieces, "but I have the honor of informing you that no subscriptions are entered upon our books until we have received the cash. If you really intended to blacken my soul with your lying infamies, you should have planked down a sample of the circulating medium of your section!"

"The gibbering idiot!" cried Smith, as he ground his heel into the floor, or rather made a vain attempt in that direction.

"Yes, that's what's the matter," affirmed Effie, with smiling calm and scorn. "You'll have to excuse this young man on the simple score of humanity for his shortcomings, Mr. Ruddle, if you can scare up no better reasons. He's simply *non con.*, if you may be quoted as authority in the premises."

"How so?" asked Smith, at a loss what else to say.

"Why, he's so nearly demented that he can not remember when you saved his life by drawing him out of the lake. He even repudiates all knowledge of any such transaction, and brings collateral proof of his view by saying that he can swim like a fish!"

"Well, he'll need to, before I get done with him," growled Ruddle savagely. "In the mean time—"

"Hello, here!" broke in the voice of Landlord Crippitt at this moment. "What on earth is the trouble here, Mr. Ruddle?"

"Ah, you know the party under his actual label, do you, Mr. Crippitt?" cried Effie. "Tell me something about him."

"There's little to say about him, because he's of no particular account," returned the landlord, whose nerves had been rasped by the destruction of his door. "He and his father, the bishop, are generally reported to be the leaders and instigators of the 'Sons of Thunder,' which gang of reprobates includes a good share of the pretended miners who haunt the Mormon mining camp of Franklin Lake!"

"What! a 'Son of Thunder!'" cried Effie, with scorn and aversion, as she recoiled from her late escort. "If such is the case, this very man may be responsible for the late attempt to murder my father."

"Your father, child? Who is your father?" asked the boniface.

"Colonel Hatton, sir."

"The chief of the Gentile camp on Ruby Lake, do you mean?"

"Yes, sir."

"Glad to hear it—glad to know you, miss," declared Crippitt, inclining himself profoundly, while Conn stared at the maiden in open-mouthed astonishment. "But, if such is the case, how does it happen that you are traveling in the company of this Mormon bandit?"

"He has stolen from the post-office a letter written to my father, in which I mentioned when I would arrive, and on the strength of having this letter he has tricked me into regarding him as a friend," explained Effie. "He said his name was Coverly, and that he was an intimate friend of father's, and that he had been

sent to Wells to fetch me to the camp on Lake Ruby."

"The scoundrell! If he ever gets into the camp in question he will stand a good chance to swing from the nearest limb," assured the worthy landlord, with the plain-speaking of a man who feels sure of being well backed, besides having a good cause. "It is generally believed in the Gentile Camp, as it is called, that this is the chap who fired the bullet which nearly cost your father his life."

The horror of Effie at the man seemed to deepen and she crossed the floor to Crippitt's side, as if to claim his protection.

"In a word, Miss Hatton, Smith Ruddle is a pirate and cut-throat of the most contemptible description," proceeded Crippitt, "and I congratulate you most sincerely upon the chapter of happy accidents which have detached you from such an undesirable association. Your desire is, I suppose, to go on to the Gentile Camp as soon as you can?"

"It is, sir. As this villain has intercepted my latest letter, in which I announced the date of my proposed arrival, it's possible that my father is not worrying about me, but I shall be very glad to arrive before he can have a chance to do so."

"Of course, miss. You shall be sent on immediately. But about this letter? You say this man has stolen it. How do you know that fact?"

"Why, he showed me the letter, sir, as a proof that my father had sent him to fetch me from the station!"

"He did?"

The tone of Crippitt had become crisp and significant.

"Then that letter is now on his person?" he added, as he turned a stern glance upon the object of his inquiry.

"It was at the latest accounts, sir."

"You hear, Mr. Ruddle? Give me that letter."

"Nonsense, landlord," returned Smith, with the air of pooh-poohing the whole proceeding. "You ought to have too much sense to mix up in squabbles which do not concern you."

"Squabbles, you infernal miscreant!" roared Crippitt, losing patience. "You steal and lie in this fashion, imposing upon Colonel Hatton's daughter to such an extent as this and then dare to talk to me of 'squabbles!' You're on dangerous ground, sir!"

The landlord bounded to the entrance of his sleeping-apartment, catching a double-barreled rifle from behind his door, and again confronted Ruddle, covering him with this weapon.

"Produce that letter, you blackguard," enjoined the landlord, sternly, "or I'll drop you in your tracks!"

"I haven't it, Mr. Crippitt," returned Ruddle, with forced calmness. "I lost it—or rather threw it away—as we came down the road."

"That's possible, as it is a State's Prison offense to be caught with it," said Crippitt. "Nevertheless, I'm not the man to take your word for it. Search him, Conn."

Conn did not hesitate to obey, and the next instant the letter in question was drawn from the villain's pocket and held up in triumph.

"Is that the letter, Miss Hatton?" asked the landlord.

Effie examined it.

"It is, sir," she answered.

"Give it to me, then," requested Crippitt.

"I'll keep it safe, as a pledge of this man's good conduct hereafter. The State authorities will be willing enough to move against these blatant Mormons, especially Bishop Ruddle and his son, as soon as they have such a definite fact as this to act upon. If this reptile ever molests you or me again, Miss Hatton, this matter of the letter will send him to prison, and with him, perhaps, the postmaster of the incriminated office. It's certainly a good entering-wedge for proceedings against him."

CHAPTER XXXII.

"SCOTCHED, BUT NOT KILLED!"

THE landlord pocketed the stolen letter, which had been handed him promptly, and continued:

"And now, Miss Hatton, will you be guided by me? I have a little brown mare which is as gentle as a lamb, and also a swift and strong stepper. Fortunately there is somewhere about the place a side-saddle. You see, therefore, that you will be able to continue your journey to your father's camp without the least difficulty or delay."

"Of course it is a straight road from here to Ruby Lake, sir?" queried Effie, after expressing her thanks warmly. "I shall have no trouble in finding my way, I suppose?"

"Bless you—no, but you are not to go alone, my dear," explained Crippitt. "Conn knows every foot of the way, and he will be delighted to be your escort."

Conn looked as if he could have hugged his employer for these considerate expressions.

"In addition to the little mare," added the landlord, "I have an ungainly sixteen-hander, with such high, sprawling action that Conn and I have never called him by any proper name, but simply refer to him as the 'dragon.' The

dragon can keep pace with the little brown mare, however, and if you two are not at the camp long before noon, the fault will be your own."

His plans for Effie thus developed, the worthy boniface turned to Smith Ruddle.

"You've heard, Mr. Ruddle," he observed, "what disposition I propose to make of this 'squabble!' Have you anything to say?"

"Nothing, sir," answered Smith, with suppressed fury. "As you have set out to play judge in this business, perhaps you had better continue to the end. What do you propose to do with me?"

"You shall soon hear, sir. Have you finished your breakfast?"

"Well, I'm not likely to take another turn at it, after this interference with my digestion," growled Ruddle.

"Quite right, sir," returned boniface. "Beware of overloading your stomach in all seasons of mental excitement. But this abstention will not lessen your bill—not in the least, sir. Where's your driver?"

"He was at the stable at latest accounts, caring for the horses."

"Ah, yes. Well, he can come in now and have his breakfast."

"You're very kind, Mr. Crippitt, but I think he can employ his time to much better advantage."

"Oh, you do?" returned Crippitt, mockingly. "You can do as you please about it, but you'll have to pay for his breakfast, whether he eats it or not. Let's recapitulate. For bursting one door from its hinges, five dollars. For care of team, with feed, one dollar. For four breakfasts—Raw-boned Davy counts as two—two dollars. For two horses, with escort, to the Gentile camp, five dollars. For the personal labor and inconvenience to which you have subjected me, two dollars. Total, fifteen dollars, and I'll thank you for the money!"

"Here it is," said Ruddle, handing it over impatiently. "What next?"

"Hold up your hands, sir!" ordered Crippitt, as he pocketed the three fives which had been handed him, and raised his rifle. "What—what do you mean, sir?"

"Obey, or take the consequences," and the weapon covered his heart. "Hold up your hands!"

The villain obeyed, with eyes blazing with fury.

"Now tie his hands behind him, Conn!"

The job was soon completed.

Then the landlord gagged the prisoner thoroughly, and dragged him into a corner of the apartment, with the remark:

"You'll have to stay here one hour after the departure of Miss Hatton and her escort, Mr. Ruddle. I'll allow you no chance of following her and making her further trouble."

Smith could only look the wrath with which this information inspired him.

"I shall also disarm you," added Crippitt, suiting the action to the word. "As you'll be two to one, after Conn's departure, you may be tempted to get square with me in your own way for the action I have taken in this matter. In any case, if you pull the teeth of a snake, you can remain certain that he will not bite you."

Paying no further attention to his prisoner, the landlord led the way from the apartment to the dining-room, leaving the hall door closed and locked behind him.

"Are you not afraid they'll kill you, sir, after we're gone?" asked Effie.

"Oh, no. I have my plans laid to get rid of them."

He turned to Conn, and added:

"And now for the brown mare and the dragon, as soon as you can, Conn."

We need not pause upon the execution of this order.

Conn was as expeditious as possible, and soon appeared at the front door, riding one horse and leading the other.

"I shall never forget your kindness, Mr. Crippitt," said Effie, with moistened eyes, as the landlord placed her in the saddle. "My father will be here as promptly as possible to add his thanks to mine. Be sure that we shall all be grateful forever!"

"Good-by, and a pleasant ride," cried the landlord. "I shall hope to see you here again some day. God bless you!"

A wave or two of the hand, and an answering flutter of the maiden's handkerchief, as she and Conn entered upon their long gallop, and Mr. Crippitt found them shut out from his view.

A few moments he stood lost in thought, and then he took his way to the stable.

"I have come, my man," he said, "to show you the way to the dining-room. You are to leave the horses where they are until further orders."

He led the way to the spot to which the thoughts of Raw-boned Davy had been turning so longingly ever since his arrival at the Tavern, and proceeded to wait upon the solitary feaster with a patience and thoroughness of devotion that left nothing to be desired.

An hour glided away unheeded by the con-

tented guest, and then Crippitt excused himself and took his way anew to the stable.

Within five minutes he had the carriage at the front door, and proceeded to convey Smith Ruddle to it, paying little heed to his moans, although the villain had evidently suffered from the tightness of his bonds, and from the vain efforts he had made to free himself from them.

"You can go now, Mr. Ruddle," said the landlord, sternly, "and I'll watch you out of sight with my rifle in hand!"

A minute later he presented himself in the dining-room, with the arms in question in readiness for use.

"You can join your master now, Davy," he said. "He's waiting for you at the front door. His bill is paid. Get on to the box, and go! Don't halt for any purpose until you are beyond the reach of this persuader!"

Rifle in hand, as he had threatened, the landlord watched the departure, smiling at the surprise exhibited by the driver, as his gaze rested upon his bowed and helpless master.

That smile had hardly vanished from his face when, five minutes later, he observed a singular smoke in the road a quarter of a mile south of the Pass-no-pass Tavern.

Arming himself again, Crippitt walked a few rods in that direction, or until he was beyond the trees which had so lately shut the carriage out from his view.

What he saw startled him.

Davy had set his employer free, as was to be expected, but the couple, instead of driving away, had hastily collected a huge pile of combustibles, including a score of rails from one of Crippitt's fences and had kindled a fire that would have roasted an ox!

Even as he looked the landlord saw the couple drawing various inflammables from under the seat of the carriage and tossing them into the fire, thus increasing its volume and fury.

Wondering, and even horrified, Crippitt ventured nearer, arriving within hearing.

"You see, curse you!" cried Ruddle, shaking his fist at the landlord. "I didn't make my arrangements for meeting the girl without also making my arrangements to miss her! She'll not escape me, you old buzzard!"

And with this he sprung into his carriage and was whirled away at a furious gallop, while he again shook his fist at Crippitt and uttered a peal of jubilant and mocking laughter.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

STRANGELY BROUGHT TOGETHER.

THE joy of Conn as he rode away from Pass-no-pass Tavern with Effie Hatton could have been read in his sparkling eyes and on his glowing features.

But he did not forget the grave responsibility resting upon him.

If he ventured to compare himself with one of the knights of his favorite romance, it was only that he might realize all the more clearly that he had undertaken a dangerous mission.

"The first point is to get a good start, Miss Hatton," he suggested, at the moment of quitting the tavern. "We had better ride for an hour as if life were at stake."

Effie complied in silence with the suggestion, following his example.

"There!" he finally ejaculated, as he glanced alternately at the flanks of the little brown mare and those of the dragon. "We'll take it easy up this long slope before us. The Pass-no-pass Tavern is at least twelve miles behind us."

Effie drew a sigh of relief.

"About this time, as the almanacs say, Mr. Ruddle is probably regaining his liberty," she said. "But he'll try in vain to overhaul us."

"Oh, there's nothing to fear from that reptile just now," returned Conn. "But we are not yet out of danger. There are hundreds of those 'Sons of Thunder,' and they are to be found in every calling and profession. They fairly line all these roads and are as active and watchful as wolves in midwinter. You are of course aware that a whole army of them have been trying to kill your father and Bert Tabor?"

"Yes, Conn. What are the motives underlying this violence? What do these men expect to gain by such conduct?"

"Nobody can exactly answer these questions, miss, but it is evident that your father is very much in the way of some of the leading Mormons, such as this Smith Ruddle, or very much hated by them."

"But why do they try to kill Mr. Tabor?"

"That's doubtless because he's always with the colonel and because the villains realize that they'll never be able to get at your father so long as Bert Tabor is in the land of the living."

The eyes of the fair girl beamed with new brilliancy at these observations, and yet with a strangely gentle light.

"I would be were here now," resumed Conn, who saw by the rapt look upon Effie's face that he need not expect a reply to his latest observation. "He's a man as is a man! Does he or the colonel know you are coming?"

"I fear not, as the wretched impostor we have left behind us stole my letter."

"Ah, that's the reason one of them was not at the station to meet you!"

"Unless, indeed, they were too busy, or in some trouble!"

"In any case, Miss Hatton, we shall have to play a sharp game to run the gantlet of these Mormons," pursued Conn, with a shade of anxiety mantling his brow. "They ride out by scores at the dead of night, with crape on their faces, and have fired many a house, turning out many a family, and held up many a stage and private carriage. This Smith Ruddle is one of the toughest of the lot. They have scores of hiding-places, passwords, grips and signals, and it is said they can telegraph all sorts of news with the aid of mirrors, flags, and even columns of smoke."

"A queer state of things," commented Effie. "Is it not high time they were suppressed?"

"It looks so, since even the Mormon Church in Utah is beginning to frown upon them, regarding them as a burlful excrescence. Until something is done, however, we may as well realize that life and liberty have no adequate guarantees in Nevada, or, rather, in Elko county."

The top of the slope to which Conn had alluded had now been reached, and the couple suddenly came upon a horseman who was sauntering in the opposite direction.

He looked sharply at them, as he returned Conn's nod of salutation, and in less than a minute after passing them had turned off into a treeless plain and began ascending the abrupt side of a hill so rocky and abrupt that it well merited the name of mountain.

"A suspicious-looking customer!" ejaculated Conn, uneasily. "Did you see how he looked at us?"

"Can he live hereabouts?" asked Effie.

"Hardly. He has come a long distance. There's not a dry hair on his horse."

The stranger was soon seen to gain the crest of the hill, and to look earnestly through a glass in the direction from which the travelers had come.

Then he was seen to set fire to a pile of brush beside him, thus causing a tall column of smoke to rise into the sky and bend over into the valley.

These incidents did not fail to make an impression upon the watchful and suspicious escort of our heroine.

"That fellow is signaling somebody ahead of us," was the explanation Conn gave of these proceedings. "He's telling them, as with so many words, that we are on the way, and that they are to stop us!"

"Then we must act accordingly," suggested Effie. "We must take some other road."

"I'll manage it," declared Conn, his face glowing with resolution. "It's a question of brain rather than of brawn! There'll be a dozen of the ruffians in waiting for us, so that a stand-up fight is out of the question!"

"I understand, Conn! We must save ourselves by our cleverness. You ought to know this neighborhood well."

"Better than any of these new-comers of the Ruddle stripe," assured Conn, contemptuously. "My whole life has been passed in the Ruby Valley. I was here, as young as I am, before the great forests were cut down, and had my share in that business. I was running a steam sawmill before I was a dozen years old. I am simply mentioning these things to show you that I'm no chicken. What I tell you to do, if we're really destined to have trouble, you can do with all your might, and have full faith in me."

A look was a sufficient answer.

It was one of those serious and yet smiling looks, intelligent and yet appealing, which goes to the very soul of him upon whom it is bestowed.

"Then I shall ride on until we see a hostile track in the road, so to speak," said Conn, quietly. "There is still a long journey before us, and I'd like to get as near to the Gentile camp as possible before we swerve a step in any direction!"

The declaration commanded Effie's heartiest approval.

"I shall leave everything to you, Conn," she replied, with charming confidence. "I'm sure you'll know just what to do, and how to do it."

Conn drew rein abruptly, raising his forefinger.

No need to explain his action, when the horses had come to a standstill.

It was a furious clatter of hoofs which had begun to resound upon their hearing.

It came from the direction in which they were going.

"Somebody's going for his life," whispered Conn hurriedly, as he led the way into some wayside bushes, rejoicing that this movement could not be seen by the watcher on the hilltop. "Must be a Gentile."

Reaching a covert, he ventured to look out from time to time, as the clatter of hoofs came nearer.

"The fugitive is nearly in sight," he reported, as he turned back from one of these hasty surveys—"so near that I can hear the army that's after him. Another look," and he suited the action to the word. "Ah! gracious heavens! It's Bert Tabor!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

EFFIE AND BERT.

EFFIE'S soul flamed from her eyes, as she sprung back toward the road.

"Sure!" she cried.

"Perfectly sure, miss!"

The girl suddenly stopped.

She was near enough to the road to be seen by Bert, as soon as he should come a little nearer, but not near enough to be seen by the pursuers for at least half a minute.

The next instant she saw him, as he continued to advance toward her.

Ah! what a picture!

At the same instant he also saw her, as she stood awaiting him in all her radiance and beauty.

What a first meeting!

Bert knew her at a glance from the photograph he had so devotedly carried near his heart for several weeks preceding.

"Prepare to get to cover, Conn!" she cried, in a voice which resounded above the clatter of the approaching hoofs. "Face about, as I do! We must find a way of retreat through these bushes!"

The couple had barely reined their steeds into the desired readiness for flight, when Bert came dashing up to Effie's side.

"Miss Hatton! What a joy to meet you! as also what a pain!" were the words which accompanied his coming.

How he looked to her!

What she thought of him?

What were their emotions?

The reader can more readily imagine all these details than we can record them.

"A thousand welcomes, Mr. Tabor," was Effie's greeting, as she extended her hand for a single brief instant. "And now to vanish!"

Conn was already leading the way, as ordered, and the young couple behind him were no less prompt to follow.

In less time than it takes to relate the fact, the trio were so far away from the road that they had an ample screen of vegetation between them and the pursuers.

"We'll wait here for them to pass," said Bert, drawing rein and dismounting. "It will be some minutes, perhaps, before they will discover that they have left us behind them and begin retracing their steps. Here they come!"

The fair face of Effie Hatton paled at the clatter caused by the hoofs of the pursuing horses and the tongues of their riders.

"It's very, very pleasant to meet you, Miss Hatton, even under these disagreeable circumstances," said Bert, as he took the maiden's hand in his own for a further clasp. "You have been so constantly in my thoughts during the last few days that you must really excuse me if I treat you like an old friend at this our first meeting."

"I am very glad to meet you, Mr. Tabor," returned Effie, as heedless of the retreat of the pursuers as our hero had been of their approach—for they had clattered past, with only Conn to peer out at them, while this conversation was in progress. "After the kind letters you have sent to me, and especially after your many months of devotion to my father, I cannot regard you otherwise than as a very dear friend."

"Infinite thanks for such a precious acknowledgment," returned Bert, scanning the flank of his jaded steed critically. "If I delay here a moment to tender my homage, for the expression of which I shall require all time and a good share of eternity," and he pressed the fair hand to his lips, "it is not because I am unmindful of our peril, but because I wish to give this poor horse a chance to gather a little strength for another terrible struggle!"

"I comprehend," breathed Effie, permitting her hand to linger confidently in the strong clasp of our hero. "You have narrowly escaped them!"

"So narrowly, that I should not have escaped them at all, had it not been for that slight bend in the road a hundred yards south of us, and also for a considerable shutting in of that bend by the branches of the great oak beside it. It's the closest call the rascals ever gave me!"

"If you please, sir," ventured Conn, catching the eye of our hero at this moment, and inclining himself profoundly. "We are within a dozen rods of the best stream within a score of miles!"

"You mean Snow Creek?"

"Yes, sir. It's as rough as swift in places, but I have often taken it instead of the road, with which it runs nearly parallel, and I think it would be wise to be in it at this moment."

"Quite right, my friend," said Bert, with an appreciative glance at Conn. "Lead on, if you will be so good."

Conn needed no urging, and the trio were promptly in motion, Bert walking until the creek in question was reached, and then springing lightly into his saddle.

"A good move," was his comment, as he saw how well the creek was shut in by its fringes of leafy verdure, and how few traces the horses had left on the bank. "It's quite possible that we shall give the pursuers the slip altogether. Who is our young friend, Miss Hatton?"

"I have known him less than two hours," re-

plied Effie, "and know little more than that his name is Conn, and that he is employed at the Pass-no-pass Tavern."

"Ah, it's there that I have seen him, as I have passed to and fro," said Bert. "I thought his face seemed familiar. You stopped at this place to breakfast, I presume?"

"Yes, thanks to Conn's ingenuity," and Effie could not help smiling at the morning's history, notwithstanding the imminence of the peril by which she was still beset. "But permit me to go back a little further in my explanations. When I left Albany for the West, I had a half-formed idea of stopping with Aunt Grace a night in Chicago, and this idea was duly carried out, so that it was from Chicago that came the letter in which I finally announced the moment of my arrival."

"You wrote, then? How unfortunate that the letter did not reach us."

"I will explain that also, Mr. Tabor. That letter was stolen from the mails by Smith Ruddle, who met me at Wells this morning, with this letter in his hand, and said that he had been sent by my father to meet me and conduct me to the camp."

The startled attention of our hero having been thus called to Ruddle's impostures, Effie proceeded, in a few graphic sentences, to make known what had happened to her since her arrival at Wells station.

With what pain and regret Bert listened to these revelations will be readily imagined.

"Believe me, Miss Hatton," he said, earnestly, "when I assure you that nothing less than the most infamous treachery could have placed you in such a terrible situation."

"Then you expected a better state of things?"

"Certainly. I have had a man in Wells more than a week, with instructions to keep an eye upon all the arrivals from the East and to take the necessary measures for your safe and prompt conveyance to our camp."

"And he has failed to respond to the trust reposed in him?" smiled Effie. "Unfortunately the bitter lessons of life which come to all—and which have come to me, despite my age—render it no difficult task for me to understand the failure of your representative to acquit himself of his mission. He may be careless, or have made some mistake, or be a votary of the bottle, or be simply the victim of some confidence he has placed in others."

Bert shook his head energetically.

"The fellow's simply a traitor, who has sold himself for cash to the Ruddles," he declared, emphatically. "That he has been well paid for his rascality I do not doubt."

"But how came you to be riding now in this direction, Mr. Tabor?" asked Effie.

"I am here on your account, of course," replied Bert, smilingly, as his eyes lingered with admiring tenderness upon the maiden's face. "I felt that to-day must be the day of your arrival. A keen suspicion of the good faith of my agent in Wells had obtruded itself. I was miserable in the wild unrest caused by this uncertainty as to your whereabouts."

"But did you mean to go as far as Wells to look for me?"

"In all candor—yes. I intended to leave this horse at Crippitt's and hire one of his for the balance of the journey to Wells and the return thither. What's more, I intended to telegraph eastward until I had got track of you and a line from you, with positive assurance of the date of your arrival. Furthermore, it was my intention to place on the watch at Wells a man in whom I could have implicit confidence. All this was in my mind, as I set forth, but I was quite hopeful of meeting you somewhere on the road."

"As you have done, in fact," smiled Effie. "Need I say how much I am pleased and touched by the thoughtful devotion you have shown in these matters? The least I can say is that I am very, very grateful!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE DESCENT OF THE CREEK.

CONN drew rein at this moment, raising his hand warningly.

"There they go—or at least a portion of them," he whispered.

A brief interval of listening was sufficient to verify the declaration.

A number of horsemen, which Bert estimated to be half of his late pursuers, were heard riding southward at a gallop.

"How far away are they, Conn?" interrogated Bert.

"About a hundred rods, sir."

"They'll naturally conclude that we have gone in that direction," said Bert, "but they'll be as squarely mistaken as they can be. I presume there are a hundred 'Sons of Thunder' between us and our camp, and I have no doubt they'll scour to and fro, as lively as a nest of hornets, for several hours to come!"

"Will it not be wise, then, to remain in the background until the pursuit is considerably slackened, sir?" asked Conn.

"That's just what I intend to do," declared Bert, "if we can find a hiding-place that responds to my wishes."

"As to that, Mr. Tabor," said Conn, "I know

where is situated just such a retreat as we need at this moment."

"Describe it."

"It's a deserted sawmill on this very stream, or rather on a branch of it, and about ten miles nearer to Franklin Lake than we are at this moment," explained Conn. "It is, in fact, in the very neighborhood where I spent a couple of winters when I was quite a small boy, as I have explained to Miss Hatton since we took leave of Mr. Crippitt."

"Is the place wholly deserted?" asked Bert, thoughtfully—"wholly out of the world?"

"Yes, sir. I do not believe it is visited from one year's end to another. One reason of this total abandonment is that the old mill is said to be haunted. It is a fact that one lumberman killed another there the winter after I quit work in the neighborhood, and I have talked with quite a number of people who believe that the ghost of the murdered man haunts the spot to this day."

"Bravo!" commented Bert. "Ride on, please. We'll certainly take a look at the old mill, even if we do not decide to pass our days there, or even buy it!"

Conn led the way again, riding a few rods in advance, and continuing to maintain a sharp lookout on all his surroundings.

"How did you leave papa to-day, Mr. Tabor?" suddenly asked Effie. "He continues to recover his strength, I hope?"

A shadow came over Bert's face.

"Yes—as much as could be expected under the anxieties he is forced to endure," he answered.

"You must answer a few questions about him, as all Smith Ruddle said to me under this head may be false," pursued the girl, with some wonder at Bert's gloomy aspect. "What is papa doing to-day?"

"Your question opens an abyss I had intended to leave closed for the present," responded our hero, with tender sympathy. "But I suppose it is my duty to answer it. The colonel has gone into the Diamond Valley—to the westward of the Humboldt Range, you know—to search for your mother."

The girl gave a wild start of pain, and a scared look came into her eyes.

Her face blanched as she slowly repeated the concluding words.

"Please explain," she said. "Is mother absent? Is she away from home?"

"We do not know where she is," said Bert, as gently as sadly. "Be brave, Effie—if I may call you audibly now by the name my soul has long been calling you—"

The look of anguish, of entreaty, of tenderest sympathy which took possession of the noble face beside her went straight to the maiden's heart.

"Oh, Bert—for I gladly respond to the endearment you offer me, I need it so!" and the girl's tears flowed like rain—"I see that something horrible has happened! Where, in Heaven's name, is my mother?"

"We do not know where she is, Effie," he answered, in a hesitating tone, as he rode nearer and took her hand. "No use to keep you in ignorance of the dreadful truth. I know you will be brave, darling Effie," and his eyes glowed with the infinite devotion of a grand, pure heart. "I know that you will feel with me that she is not beyond the reach of the Great Hand whose mercies are ever around us. We have not seen your mother—neither your father nor I—since she reached Nevada more than a week ago. We only know that she has been abducted by parties unknown from the stage in which she was journeying from Elko to Huntington, at a spot called Bradley's Woods, and that not the least trace of her whereabouts has since been discovered."

A moan of terrible anguish came from the lips of the terrified and appalled hearer.

She reeled as if about to fall from her saddle.

"You—you have no idea who her abductor is, Bert?" she faltered.

"Oh, yes; a well-defined idea of his identity," answered our hero. "Everything points to Bishop Ruddle as the author of this outrage. The real name of this man is Norman Daggett."

"Daggett?" echoed Effie. "I remember the name well. It is that of a man who was a clerk, many years ago—I know not how many—in a store where my father was, I think, a bookkeeper. A man of the worst character, if I am not mistaken, who passed quite a long time in prison."

"Yes, that's the man," pursued Bert. "He has turned up here as a bishop of the Mormon Church and has accumulated a large fortune. You may judge what he really is by the conduct of his son. As to the motives which have influenced him in these proceedings, they are only too apparent. Norman Daggett was an unsuccessful suitor many years ago for the hand of your mother, and had also laid up a feeling of revenge against your father for certain testimony he was required to give against this criminal."

"I have an inkling of all those early troubles," said Effie. "And so that man is here and dangerously active and violent?"

"Yes, Effie. There can be no doubt that Nor-

man Daggett, otherwise Bishop Ruddle, has seized your mother and is holding her in a cruel captivity at no great distance. But where?"

"Perhaps at his own house," suggested the girl.

"No. Your father and I, with a hundred men, searched every nook and corner of his house at a very early hour this morning, while the bishop looked on mockingly. It is almost needless to add that we did not find the least suggestion of a captive."

"He may have some secret cellar you did not explore, Bert."

"That is true, and it is our intention to give his premises a still closer overhauling as soon as we can get around to it."

At this instant Conn drew rein again, scanning the flanks of the dragon.

"There's a deep hole just ahead of us," he announced, "so that we shall be obliged to take to the bank for the next mile or two, as the bed of the stream is broken and rocky. But I think we may now let the horses have the drink they've been so long trying to reach. They're well cooled off with this easy jaunt in the brook and under the shade."

"Quite right, Conn," returned Bert. "My horse is warm yet, but a drop will not hurt him, as we shall keep moving."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ANOTHER SUSPICIOUS ENCOUNTER.

THE horses having quenched their thirst, Conn led the way up the bank, still keeping in the shade afforded by the trees lining the creek.

Here all drew rein a moment and listened.

Not a sound disturbed the silence.

"We are too far from the road to hear the pursuers," said Conn, "at least five or six miles, as Snow Creek takes a considerable turn to the eastward before it empties into Franklin Lake, while the road trends constantly to the westward. But it's clear enough that the pursuers have no suspicion of the course we have taken, or we should hear them buzzing behind us, and might even expect to see them coming across the plains on our right to intercept us. Thus far, Mr. Tabor, we have certainly been favored!"

"True, Conn, and you may be sure that we shall not forget that we owe this safety to your suggestions."

Conn flushed warmly at this acknowledgment of his services.

"I only hope our good luck will continue," he said, as he resumed progress, "and indeed why shouldn't it? The deserted mill is not only about the last place in which they would think of looking for us, but they would naturally adopt the theory that we are all taking the shortest cut possible for the Gentile camp."

"All of which is perfectly argued," commented Bert. "So far, we could not have done better. One great essential we have secured is to give the horses—especially mine—the breathing spell of which they had such absolute need. Should the enemy show up again, it's reasonable to think that we would be able to hold our own until some further point in our favor is developed."

Effie drew a long breath of relief.

Her eyes were still moist with tears, which would come, despite all the strength she derived from Bert, and all the natural hopefulness and elasticity of her spirits, but she could not wholly despair of her mother's eventual safety.

How her whole being cried out to Bert for consolation and support at that moment, is already plainly apparent, and it is not too much to say that he more than responded to the cherished ideal which for weeks had been her constant companion.

As discreet as sensible, Conn kept several rods ahead of the lovers—as we may unhesitatingly call them—so as to afford them an opportunity of exchanging their explanations and sentiments without being bothered with him.

After a long and somewhat monotonous ride, varied with occasional returns to the stream, and numerous halts to listen for any sounds of pursuit that might have arisen, the boy guide once more drew rein.

"Just ahead of us," he reported, "the Snow Creek is crossed by the road which runs from the Humboldt Range to the Goshute Mountains, by way of Sprucemont. It is very little used, and there is no especial danger of being seen here, but I think we had better cross singly, keeping to the creek, or rather that I had better cross alone, and so warn you if there is any one approaching from either direction."

"Of course, Conn," assented Bert.

Entering the stream anew, Conn continued to follow it until he had crossed the road, which of course had no bridge.

Everything being as it should be, Conn beckoned to the lovers, and they hastened to join him.

"As you see," said Conn, as he again took the lead, "we are now plunging into an almost pathless wilderness—a growth of young pines, in fact," and he waved his hand over his surroundings. "For miles hereabouts, these used to be as fine a forest as you will find anywhere in the Rockies. What we see around us now

is a mere growth, which is all the way from six to eight years old."

"You had a hand, I suppose, Conn, in taking off the original forest?" queried Bert.

"Yes, sir—to the extent of driving teams and otherwise waiting on the lumbermen."

"How far is it from here to the deserted mill, Conn?" asked Effie.

"Not far from three miles, miss. Just here we are pretty well hemmed in by this new growth, but further on—within a mile, I think—we shall reach a district where the forest has been ravaged repeatedly by fire, and we shall then be able to get along more readily."

"I see you are leaving the creek, Conn," remarked our hero.

"Yes, sir. I am cutting across the angle formed by the creek and its branch, so as to get to the mill as soon as possible."

In two or three places the guide leaped to the ground, and cut and broke branches, so as to render the path more open, and once he was obliged to retrace his steps a few rods. This was not owing to any lapse in his memory, but simply to the marvelous growth of the new forest.

"There!" Conn at length ejaculated, with an involuntary sigh of relief. "The worst is now over. We have reached the burnt district to which I referred."

The lovers looked around in wonder, as they continued to press forward.

A vast sea of stumps, little and great, all charred and blackened, some of them nearly level with the ground, and others twenty or thirty feet in height, had presented itself in the line of their advance, and offered a succession of fire-swept aisles for their passage.

"What a scene of desolation and destruction!" murmured Effie, interested, despite her great sorrow, in the novelty of her surroundings. "I never saw anything like it!"

"We are near the deserted mill now," at length announced Conn, when a large tract of the burnt forest had been left behind the travelers. "We shall be able to see it, I think, when we reach the crest of the divide just ahead of us."

"It's not to be wondered at that no one ever comes here," said Effie to Bert, in a low voice filled with a sentiment akin to awe. "What a solitude it is!"

Preoccupied, curious and expectant, the party had nearly reached the divide mentioned, when Conn slipped to the ground excitedly and took refuge behind a group of young pines, motioning his companions to do likewise.

"Great heavens!" he breathed, with outstretched hand. "Do you see that man who is riding toward the deserted mill? He is Bishop Ruddle!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A STARTLING ARRIVAL.

In the parlor of his elegant residence sat Bishop Ruddle, with an eager and expectant air, and also with the air of being somewhat ill at ease.

The intensity and frequency of his glances along the road from a front window attested that something had gone wrong.

"Strange that he does not come," he ejaculated. "Where can he be?"

Suddenly there was a clatter of hoofs, and his son, Smith Ruddle, came galloping up to the door, and hastily dismounted and entered.

"Alone?" was the bishop's wondering greeting.

"As you see, father. I've had the girl, but lost her! The strangest thing!"

He gave a hurried sketch of his meeting with Effie Hatton, and of the manner in which she had made her escape.

"Sorry," commented the father. "But I expected it. I've been deeply depressed all day, although I can hardly tell you why!"

"Well, the pendulum 'll soon swing in the other direction," declared Smith. "As a proof, take this fact: I hear from Brottle that Colonel Hatton has gone into the Diamond Valley to look for his wife, and that he will come back to-night on the stage!"

"Indeed. Well, it *does* seem then," returned the bishop, almost petulantly, "as if we might make sure of him at last!"

"Oh, I'll have him this time," assured Smith, as his eyes glowed savagely. "I'll not only make my arrangements to nab him, but I'll take good care to do it in such a way that no human being except ourselves will know what has become of him!"

"Good," muttered the bishop, vengefully. "And now, Smith, a hint as to what is to be done with him. You see that we cannot use this place again as a *jug*. It's well we removed Mrs. Hatton as we did! If she had been here this morning, she would have certainly been found, and then what a fuss! what scandal!"

"Your idea is to take the colonel to some new artesian well?"

"We'll take him to Deadhill for a day or two—until we have got the information we want—and then to his final hole! I am anxious to make an end of this whole matter—in a word," and his eyes blazed fitfully, "to complete the

revenge which has so long been the supreme joy of my life!"

"To Deadhill it is, then!" returned Smith. "And if I get hold of the girl, as I still hope to do, I will take her there also."

"In any case, I shall take the mother there in the course of the day or evening. Pity we can't get the whole family together there! I'd like to have them all in our hands and at our mercy, and lay down the facts to them!"

"It would be glorious, sure enough," declared Smith, as a darker glow mantled his face.

"We'll try to realize the hope. I shall be busy as a bee, of course, during the next few hours, but I'll expect to meet you at Deadhill, with the colonel in hand, by nine in the evening, if I do not send you word to the contrary."

"All right, Smith," said the bishop, as he arose. "That hour will just suit me."

Smith made another suggestion or two, and then took his departure as hurriedly as he had come.

At the moment of his retreat, Teecomo could have been seen to glide away from one of the open windows of the parlor, or rather from the dense shrubbery beneath it, in which hiding-place he had listened to every word exchanged between the father and son.

The bishop had taken barely a dozen turns in his parlor, with a cloudy and thoughtful brow, when Shawgun, his hostler, made his appearance from the stable, leading a spirited saddle-horse which his employer had just ordered for a ride.

"I'll be out in a moment, Shawgun," said the bishop, stepping to the open window.

"If you please, sir, I am coming to the door to exchange a word with you," returned the hostler, as he proceeded to secure the horse to a hitching-post.

"See me," repeated the bishop, with an air of annoyance. "What about?"

"Well, sir, I thought I'd quit, if you have no objections," announced Shawgun, as he advanced toward the window.

The bishop was angry, as was shown by the flush that ran over his face.

Something like a reproach arose to his lips, but he suppressed it.

Instead, he asked: "How much do I owe you?"

"Sixty-five dollars, sir."

The bishop counted out the money, and passed it to Shawgun, who secured it in his pocket-book, but did not offer to retire.

"Well, what else?" asked Ruddle.

"You will remember that you agreed to pay me extra for certain midnight drives, rascalities, falsehoods, and other dirty work, sir!"

"True, Shawgun. Here's a fifty extra."

"That'll do, bishop," said the hostler, as he pocketed the gift. "It's more than I expected. I have not failed to notice, during the few months I have been in your pay, that you regard rascals of every description as about the cheapest drug in the market! Good-morning, sir!"

"One moment, Shawgun. Will you mention your reason for leaving?"

"Oh, there is nothing very special, sir," returned the hostler, with a curious smile, "but I thought I'd be out of the way of the crash!"

"The crash?"

"Yes, sir. If I'm any judge, your bark's on a lee-shore, and bound to touch bottom within the next twenty-four hours. There are too many spies hereabouts, too much going and coming. I could speak of certain proceedings—but I won't. It's enough that I'm out of the mud-dle."

And Shawgun retired toward the stable without another word.

"Now, what does that rascal mean?" muttered the bishop, looking after him.

He mused upon the problem a few minutes, or until a carriage—his own, with Jerry on the box—came rolling up to the door, and he saw Bullion Red and his pals looking out of the interior of the vehicle at him.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

VARIOUS CLASHING INTERESTS ADJUSTED.

It is safe to say that the bishop was never more astonished at anything in his life than at this return of the outlaws he had so particularly favored.

As he sunk helplessly into a chair, they all came bursting in upon him, with Jerry, or "Captain Lightning," at their head.

"What does this mean, Jerry?" asked the bishop, with a shudder of horror at seeing his satin-covered furniture and his velvet carpet invaded by this sort of presence.

"It means, sir," answered Jerry, "that there's no getting through. All the roads and passes are blockaded. More than fifty men to the eastward are trying to earn that five thousand dollars reward. The telegraph has been on the jump all night—and all day for that matter."

These several sentences, which were uttered with panting breath and terrified mien, were like so many dagger-thrusts for the listener.

"In short, sir," resumed Jerry, as he sunk into a chair, while the three outlaws stood crowding around master and man, "I was

obliged to take the back track, and it was only by having such good horses, and by reaching a quarter where the telegraph is out of the game, that I've been able to avoid capture."

"And only by hard knocks, too," amended Bullion Red, as he shoved his swollen fist under the bishop's nose as evidence. "We pulled through twice by downright battle, leaving our would-be captors in a shattered condition by the wayside."

The bishop staggered to his feet. His frown was something awful to look upon.

"And now the question is, sir," continued Jerry, "what's to be done? There are of course a score of howling pursuers at no great distance behind us. Some of them will certainly turn up here in the course of the day or night. These men cannot remain here, bishop."

"Here?"

The bishop's voice was almost a shriek. The idea of such a trio of outlaws being caught in the episcopal palace!

"Of course you won't turn us out to die, *old pard*!" suggested Bullion Red, as he sidled into the very chair from which the bishop had arisen.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Ruddle, as he suddenly averted his nose. "The fellow's reeking with whisky!"

"Reeking's no name for it," said Jerry, as if emboldened by the bishop's independent discovery to tell the truth. "These chaps have been swilling ever since we started. All the supplies you gave them, and which were intended to last a week or two, have been entirely demolished. Bullion Red swore he'd have one good time more, let come what would come."

"Yes, *old pard*, and he's had it," roared Bullion Red, as he drew an uncorked bottle from his pocket and began flourishing it in wild jubilation, scattering showers of the bishop's best port over his best carpet. "And now for the conclusion of the whole matter."

He turned on his heel, at the same time arising from his chair, and thrust his face within six inches of the bishop's.

"Of course you'd be sorry to have us arrested here, *Norman*," he resumed, "and so we'll continue into the mountains; but you'll have to pay us handsome."

"Pay you?" gasped Ruddle.

"Yes, *old pard*! You've given us three thousand dollars, a good share of which has already been spent in bribing the enemy, but money's nothing to you, and so we make bold to ask you for ten thousand dollars more. Is it not so, *pards*?"

"It certainly is!" answered both of the pals of Bullion Red, as their leader thus sought their opinions.

"And we'll stay here till we get it, *Norman*," assured Horrucks, as he resumed his seat, while his two pals, in obedience to a wave of his hand, planted themselves upon the satin-covered sofa.

The bishop lost all patience.

"You won't get another cent, you villains," he cried, becoming as white as a sheet.

"Then there'll be a high old row here," roared Horrucks. "*Bang!*"

He hurled his bottle at a full-length mirror opposite the position he had taken and shivered it into a thousand fragments.

Then the three ruffians drew their revolvers and began firing at other mirrors, at the choice statuary, and at the costly clocks.

"Seize them!" yelled the bishop, dancing about excitedly. "Kill them, Jerry!"

Instead of complying, Captain Lightning got to cover as promptly as possible.

"Ho, ho! That's easier said than done!" cried Horrucks. "Suppose you try it yourself, *old pard*? Come here!"

"One moment, Horrucks!" gasped the bishop, who was hardly able to articulate. "Stop shooting! Sit down! I'll let you have five thousand dollars more with which to make your way in any desired direction. I will also give you a pair of fresh horses and the carriage in which you have just come."

"Bravo!" roared Horrucks.

"And what's still more to the point," declared the bishop, hurriedly, "I'll have Jerry drive you immediately to a place where you can remain hidden till night, or later."

"Bravo!" commented Horrucks again, as he restored his revolver to his pocket and motioned to his pals to do likewise. "Now you begin to talk, *old pard*. It's a bargain!"

"Not quite," amended Captain Lightning, with a peculiar smile, and one which struck the bishop as disfavorably as if it had been the hiss of a rattlesnake. "This affair will not be concluded until I have had a few words to say to Miss Millsie, the bishop's daughter, who is now at the door and who has been brave enough to look in upon us, even while the bullets were flying."

"Miss Millsie!" cried Ruddle. "What do you mean, Jerry?"

"Oh, leave him to me, papa," said Millsie, presenting herself at the hall-door, as calm as ever, and looking really radiant in her faultless summer attire. "I will find out what he means. Come here, Jerry."

The coachman took his way to the hall,

Millsie closed with a firm hand the door between him and her father.

"To the point now, Jerry," she said.

"Well, miss," declared Jerry, with a profound inclination, "you know that I have long loved and admired you. True, I have been your father's coachman, and have done a great deal of his dirty work, but I've not yet been forced to change my name, nor have I had such an associate as Bullion Red. Now, Millsie, as much as I love you, I would gladly make way for any of your high ideals, if they could be realized in flesh and blood, for I am really devoted to you. So entirely devoted, that I would like you to authorize me to be your protector, not only from the Bullion Reds, but also from your own father and brother. Your good sense must tell you that they'll soon be in trouble, and that you and I, if you will marry me, can reign here in splendor and happiness, you as the heiress of your father, in whose favor his will is already made, and I as your devoted, admiring and protecting husband. Shall such be our destiny, Millsie? Will you marry me?"

"I will, Jerry," replied the bishop's daughter, without a single instant's hesitation. "The day of dreaming is past. It's time for us both to accept our destinies, as we find them actually cut and dried by the course of events, and I will gladly become your one legal wife at any moment you choose to call in a justice of the peace to perform the necessary ceremony."

"A thousand thanks!" cried Jerry, as he exchanged a kiss of unalloyed satisfaction with the bride so strangely secured. "United, we can control all possible tempests, my dear Millsie, and reap all possible harvests. Depend upon me to do all I can for your father and brother, but do not ask me to ruin myself with them."

"You know I'll not do that, Jerry," said the girl, as she opened the door with quite as firm a hand as she had displayed in closing it. "Papa, here is Jerry, who is quite at your service, and who now presents himself to you in the character of my betrothed husband. If you have no objections, and your affairs are not too pressing, we shall be glad to be married this evening at nine o'clock, by Justice Norton."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

RUDDLE'S PRESENCE EXPLAINED.

THE bishop looked from one to the other with a bewildered sort of air, as if such a match had never suggested itself as one of the possibilities of the future.

"Is not this sudden?" he asked.

"It may be for you, sir," answered Jerry, with a return of his disagreeable smile. "But I have had the idea for months past, as I gave due attention to the dirty loads you placed upon my shoulders, that such a recompense for my services would be in every way natural and befitting."

Ruddle turned abruptly to his daughter.

"Are you not unwise, Millsie?" he asked.

"I venture to think not, papa," replied the girl, as she embraced her father in her new relation. "There is no pretense that Jerry is exactly the sort of husband I have been looking for, but he's clearly about as good a one as I can hope to secure under the clouds which are beginning to descend upon our pathway."

Bullion Red seemed to discover that there was something personal in these allusions.

"I s'pose we are the 'clouds' referred to?" he exclaimed, with a scowl, as he turned his blood-shot eyes upon the maiden and included his two pals in the compliment with a flourish of his swollen fist.

"Not at all, Mr. Horrucks," returned Millsie, with that ready tact which characterizes her sex, as she turned to the formidable outlaw and offered her hand with a smile that charmed him. "I was thinking of far different matters. I am sure, after all Jerry has done for you, Mr. Horrucks, that you will wish us the best of luck and that you will drink to our healths in some snug retreat in the mountains, in the course of the evening, the bottle of choice wine I shall now present to you for that purpose."

"Bravo!" cried the outlaw once more. "This is what I call angelic! Sooner perish my right hand than I put a straw in the way of one who so well knows how to be a lady! Is it not so, boys?"

"Every time, and without winking," was the answer of one of the parties addressed, while the other winked as knowingly as his condition permitted.

"Then it's a go, boys," said Horrucks, as he gave Millsie's hand a final shake and gained his feet. "Let's hurry away, in Jerry's care, to that snug retreat of which the bishop has been telling us and make another attempt to pass the wall which seems inclined to close upon us. But there's one thing you have forgotten, old pard."

The bishop turned quickly, with a startled air, to see what new levy was to be made upon him.

"I simply refer to the five thousand dollars additional you've agreed to give us," explained Horrucks.

"Be quiet here a moment," returned Ruddle. "I'll go and get it."

"And I'll go and get the wine to which I referred," said Millsie.

Father and daughter left the room together.

"You may leave me to select that wine, Millsie," said the bishop, as he detained his daughter a moment in the hall. "You've no idea what a horror those men have become to me."

"To the contrary, I'm only too keenly alive to the situation," was Millsie's reply, as her face flushed with suppressed shame and anger.

"But about this marriage with Jerry? Is your mind fully made up to it?"

"Yes, papa. Why shouldn't it be? After all these hideous histories and connections," she added, bitterly, "I'm sure that we ought to thank Jerry for being willing to marry me and stand between me and all the dreadful possibilities looming up before us. I desire the wedding for to-night, papa!"

"Then so be it! And now to get rid of these ruffians. I shall let Jerry drive them to that deserted mill on Snow Creek, of which I have more than once spoken. There we'll wash his hands of them, with sundry suggestions about making their way into the mountains and through them. Ten to one they'll be caught within a week, but I hope it will be at a long distance from the Ruby Valley. In any case, you and I will swear *solid*, with Smith and Jerry to back us, and it will be impossible for them to ever prove that they have had the slightest contact with me."

"But how about the horses and carriage, papa?" asked Millsie, who did not at all wonder at the profound attention the bishop seemed to be giving at that moment to dissociating himself from all connection with the fugitives.

"Oh, I shall say, if the question arises, that the villains have stolen the rig from my stable. But enough. Pack a few provisions in a basket and let us be off."

He proceeded to his study, where he counted out five thousand dollars from a roll of money in his desk and placed the same in his pocket.

Then he selected a bottle of wine from a large quantity in one of his cupboards, after a long and careful examination of its label, while his eyes gleamed venomously.

"The sooner this 'old pard' business is settled forever the better," he muttered. "I'll risk the money to avoid further scenes, but I shall be mistaken if I do not recover it from the pockets of the sleepers before this time to-morrow."

Proceeding to the pantry, he gave the bottle to Millsie, with orders to stow it away under the collation she was busy preparing.

"I am going to take a ride," he added. "In fact, I am going to pay another visit to the deserted mill! I shall take a led horse with me, with a lady's saddle, and again make a change in Mrs. Hatton's hiding-place."

The girl winced, as if a sharp pain had traversed her frame.

"I am sorry to see you so absorbed in your war on the Hattons," she said. "No good will come of it. You should have let bygones be bygones. Both you and Smith are very, very foolish. Jerry and I both think so."

"We'll see about that—after I've paid a visit to that lost silver-mine," and Ruddle smiled. "Tell Bullion Red I will give him the money at the spot where I shall take leave of him. Tell Jerry to drive the villains quietly to the deserted mill. As you see, my horse is at the hitching-post, and I'll slip away now."

And such were the circumstances under which Bishop Ruddle had appeared to the gaze of Bert, Effie and Conn, as related, near the old deserted mill of Snow Creek.

CHAPTER XL.

THE WATCHERS AND THE WATCHED.

LET us now see what singular results were destined to grow out of this meeting.

The first glance of Conn had not extended beyond the recognition of the bishop, but his second took in the fact that Ruddle was possessed of two horses, one of which he was leading.

"Singular, is it not?" queried Conn.

"A little odd, I confess," returned Bert Tabor, still keeping between him and Ruddle the screen of leaves and branches which had presented itself so opportunely for the use of his party. "But it is nevertheless easy of explanation. His relations to his fellows may be such that he feels the necessity of being able to ride for his life at any desired moment."

"No, that isn't the explanation of the mystery," said Effie Hatton, with a wondering start. "See! the saddle is for a lady."

A fact so striking could not have failed to provoke instant and earnest discussion.

"There must certainly be a lady involved in the matter," was the conclusion to which Bert soon gave utterance.

"But what lady?" asked Conn.

The eyes of the two young men turned inquiringly upon Effie.

Her face paled to an ashen hue.

She clasped her hand to her heart, clinging to Bert for support.

"Can you guess what awful fear, thought, or suspicion—what shall I call it?—forces itself upon my mind at this moment, Bert?" she demanded, in a barely audible tone.

Bert nodded assent, with glances as full of tender pity as love.

"Yes," she avowed, "I feel, almost know, that my mother is a prisoner in yonder mill!"

Again Bert assented.

The suspicion had struck him independently the instant he discovered the nature of the saddle carried by the second horse.

"What, indeed, is more likely?" suggested Conn. "There is not a more lonely spot in Elko county, or in all Nevada!"

"It's very handy, too, to the bishop's abode!" whispered Bert.

"And at a long distance from the great trail which passes to the westward of the two lakes!" observed Conn. "In fact, just such a spot as the bishop would have chosen as the hiding-place of his victim!"

Ignorant alike of the presence and comments of his watchers, Bishop Ruddle had taken his way quietly to the mill.

It stood on an abrupt and rocky slope, or steep-sided ledge, without a tree or a bush within a dozen rods of it.

Its timbers were seared white and brown in places by the burning suns which had for many years poured their rays upon them.

Some of them had rotted away or fallen.

The old wheel at one side of it was a mere wreck of decaying wood and iron.

The trough which had once carried the water to the wheel had so utterly perished that only a few unsightly pillars of stone indicated the line it had followed.

The dam which had formed the front of a pond higher up the creek had been broken away in the center, leaving the creek free to pursue its ancient course.

The upper end of the mill was merely a single story in height, while the other was three, its foundations on this side consisting of tall stone pillars, not more than two feet square, which stood in a pool of water.

The path by which the bishop had reached the mill led only to the upper side, for here was the entrance.

Dismounting near the door, which had evidently been newly strengthened and repaired, Ruddle hitched his horses to one of the iron staples which had been inserted in a rocky projection of the hill during the early days, and then gave himself prompt admittance to the building, after a keen glance around, vanishing from view.

A moment Effie stood staring at the spot where the bishop had vanished, and then she turned her glances anew upon Bert.

"Now what are we to do?" she asked.

"Ought we to follow him?"

"No, Effie."

"Or seize the horses?"

"Not just yet, at any rate," declared Bert, as he proceeded to hitch her horse and his own, while Conn followed his example. "All we can do, at this moment, is to creep a little nearer, with the favor of those rocks you notice between the door of the mill and the top of the ledge. Come."

The movement was successfully accomplished, and the trio at once set themselves to listening intently.

"I hear nothing," at length breathed Effie, who was clinging to the arm of our hero. "How still everything is! Just as if Ruddle had vanished into the depths of the earth!"

"Perhaps he has!" suggested Conn, venturing to sustain the hopefulness of the situation with a smile. "I remember that there used to be a vast cellar at this end of the mill—a cellar, in fact, which represented a considerable cave which existed here long before the mill was built!"

"Indeed?" commented Bert, with the air of being greatly struck by the information. "If such a hole really exists beneath us, the fact may be taken as an additional proof that there is some sinister meaning involved in Ruddle's presence."

He reflected a few moments, with his eyes lingering lovingly upon Effie's anxious features, and then resumed, in the same low tone of voice which all had hitherto used:

"Our plan of action is pointed out by the situation itself. We must remain here until Ruddle comes back to the light of day. If he comes alone, or comes accompanied by some willing associate, we will remain just where we are until he has vanished. On the other hand, if he should reappear with a prisoner, and that prisoner should be your mother, Effie, you will not need to ask Conn and me to take action."

At this instant Effie caught the arm of our hero, while a sudden pallor invaded her features.

"Am I mistaken?" she asked, raising her fair hand warningly.

Bert and Conn listened again.

"No," then said the former. "What you hear approaching is a carriage, and it seems to be coming here. Listen."

A couple of hoarse and Bacchanalian voices suddenly rung out on the silence, producing nearly as great an effect upon Effie and her friends as would have been caused by the explosion of a bomb.

They were the voices of Bullion Red and one of his two lively pals.

Then the voice of Captain Lightning was heard in remonstrance, and the sound of wheels took the place of the silenced voices, and blended with the sounds caused by the hoofs of a pair of horses rapidly driven.

"Heavens! They're coming here!" breathed Effie, in accents of keen alarm. "What does this mean, Bert?"

"I cannot imagine! Caution! keep out of sight! Ah!"

The carriage had come out into view, following the same path, and taking the same direction, as Ruddle had taken before it.

"You know them, Bert?" whispered Effie.

"Yes. The driver is 'Captain Lightning,' the coachman of the bishop, the very man who is believed to have shot your father. As to the people with him, one on the seat, and at least two inside—ah! I know them! They are Bullion Red and his pals, the famous robbers!"

Breathless in their hiding-place, Effie and her friends waited until the carriage had rolled up to the door and the three outlaws had alighted.

"A good hiding-place, sure enough!" cried Bullion Red, with a keen glance around. "But where's the old man? I want that five thousand dollars. Hello, here!"

He kicked the door of the mill violently, at the same time pounding upon it.

The next instant the door opened, and a grim-looking woman, of the hospital nurse pattern, appeared to the gaze of all present.

"Jerusalem! Here's a Jack-in-the-box!" cried Red, with the air of believing that he had got a touch of delirium tremens. "Take her away!"

The grim-looking woman extended a brawny arm, and gave him a "wipe" that nearly landed him, taken by surprise as he was, under the heels of the horses.

"Out of the way, brat!" she cried. "Make way for a lady!"

The lady appeared in the doorway of the mill, pale, quiet, and self-possessed, with the bishop just behind her.

One glance from Effie, and a wild cry arose to her lips, as she sprung into view involuntarily.

"My mother!" she shrieked. "Look, Bert! Oh, my God! it is my poor mother!"

"Now, Con!"

It was all Bert said, but it was enough.

Down the rocky declivity he went like winged lightning, and with him went Conn, neither scarcely heeding the awful odds against them.

In a few brief moments Mrs. Hatton had been separated from her enemies and hurried toward the carriage, in which direction Effie had also hastened.

Another brief struggle, and the mother and daughter were within the vehicle.

But their antagonists had been quick to rally. Bullion Red the quickest of all.

"Ho, ho! Game of another sort!" had been his cry, as his glances flew from the mother to the daughter. "Quick, boys! Down with these kids! Let's carry these women away into the hills with us!"

CHAPTER XLII.

A SWEEPING DEFEAT.

If Bert and his young associate had achieved an initial success, it was simply because of their daring and activity, as assisted by the surprise into which their sudden descent of the hillside had thrown their assailants.

But the odds against them were too great to permit them to hope for a permanent victory.

They had to contend with no less than five strong men, not to mention the grim old woman with the hospital countenance, who had been in charge of Mrs. Hatton ever since her capture, and who was as devoted as any dependent hireling can be to the party who holds her soul in absolute subjection.

This old woman, in fact, was the worst feature of the situation.

She not only tried to force her way into the carriage, but she literally swarmed upon the boys, getting in their way, and clutching them with claws worthy of a tiger.

As to Mrs. Hatton, she had fainted in the arms of her daughter, who was thus counted out as a factor in the fight.

Nevertheless, taking their stand with their backs to the carriage, Bert and Conn whipped out their revolvers, and menaced with death the bellowing outlaws they had in front of them, with Bishop Ruddle dancing about close in the rear of the three fugitives, and trying to get a shot at either Conn or young Tabor.

"I should smile," roared Bullion Red, with all the fury of his deep potations, "to see a couple o' kids like that knock out about a dozen hearty men! Down with 'em!"

"Back there, or die!" was Bert's stern answer to these incitements, as his revolver pivoted in such a way as to keep even Bullion Red himself at a respectful distance. "Back, I say!"

With her arms akimbo the old jaileress divided her attention a moment between the boys and their assailants.

"Leave 'em to me, bishop!" she then cried, advancing anew. "I care no more for them school-boys than for a baby in arms! Just see me pull 'em down!"

"Go away, old woman!" warned Bert. "I shall shoot you if you trouble us!"

Such a fury as these words provoked can with difficulty be imagined.

Especially the phrase "old woman!"

She bounded to the assault as if possessed.

"I'll 'old woman' you!" she shouted. "Leave 'em to me! They don't dare shoot me!"

She was quite wrong in this calculation.

Bert was getting both tired and desperate, and he would have certainly fired upon the old creature—at least to the extent of winging her—had he been left free to act out his natural inclinations, as developed by such dire necessity.

But here occurred the meanest and most brutal—as well as most fateful—of all the events which were destined to characterize the struggle.

At this instant, when Bert was engaged with the enemy in front of him and giving very little attention to Captain Lightning, who was indeed looked upon somewhat as a neutral, if not as an enemy of Bullion Red and his pals, at this critical moment, we say, Jerry leaned from his box and gave Bert a blow upon the temple with the butt of his heavily-loaded whip which stretched him senseless at the feet of the old woman who had been endeavoring to seize him.

"Good!" was her cry, as she pounced upon him and drew him into the midst of the outlaws, who hastened to bind him. "Now for the other!"

It was easier said than done.

Conn had already got a little wild with the conflict, and the fall of his chief drove him to desperation.

He began shooting rapidly, making no discrimination on account of sex, his first bullet going through the arm of his tormentress and his second giving Bullion Red such a close call as to cause him to dodge, and by that time Captain Lightning had leaped upon him from behind, bearing him in a heap to the ground, where several hands soon reduced him to helplessness and disarmed him, leaving him bound.

"Oh, I'm killed!" cried the wounded woman, who had been prompt, to fill the air with her groans.

"Nonsense! Bind your handkerchief around it and stop howling," enjoined Ruddle. "Get up on that box beside Jerry, and don't open your head again till I tell you to."

The woman hastened to obey.

"One moment, old pard," said Bullion Red, as he turned blazing eyes upon the bishop. "Don't try to run this machine faster than the wheels can turn. Where's my money?"

"Here it is, Horrucks," returned Ruddle, as he handed the ruffian a large roll of bills. "And now get into the mill as soon as you can with your comrades. I am anxious after all this shooting and hullabaloo to get out of the neighborhood."

"Into the mill, eh?" sneered Bullion Red, as he looked over the money with a comprehensive eye and then secured it on his person. "I've changed my mind, old pard. I'm not going to stay here another minute. Are we, boys?"

"Not another minute," answered both of the ruffians, in chorus.

"Then help those ladies out of the carriage and be gone," said the bishop. "I am not disposed to quarrel with you about so small a matter. Whether you stay here till morning, as I suggested, or resume your flight immediately, it will be all the same to me."

He moved toward the carriage, but Bullion Red barred the way.

"Not another step, old pard," warned the outlaw, as his eyes took a deeper tint. "You remember, I hope, how easily I used to handle you in the old days—"

"Silence!"

"Then go your way, bishop," growled Bullion Red, with a savage leer. "The ladies are going with us!"

The bishop made a movement toward presenting his revolver, but as quick as a flash his hand was pinioned, and the next instant he lay upon his back, with the knee of Bullion Red upon his chest, and his own pistol pressing against his temple.

"Bind him, pard," enjoined the victor, with a nod to his nearest pal.

The ruffian addressed did not hesitate.

"Come to me, Jerry," cried the bishop. "Save me!"

"He'd better not," said the third of the outlaws, as he covered Jerry's form with a revolver. "Get down from that box, Jerry."

Captain Lightning obeyed with anxious celerity.

"Now, walk off in the direction of your waiting bride," added the third ruffian, "and don't dare to look behind you!"

Jerry did so in silence.

The outlaws looked after him in silence, as did Conn and the bishop, until he was out of sight.

"That leaves us reasonably in possession of the field, bishop," said Bullion Red, with a chuckle. "It's hard to say what fate has in store for us, but I reckon you'll have trouble enough of your own to look after, without worrying yourself to make trouble for me!"

He turned to the old woman on the box and resumed:

"Is that wound a bad one, mother?"

"Not so bad as I thought—a mere singe, so to speak."

"Glad to hear it. Get inside with the ladies, and help yourself to some of the brandy you will find in one of the uncorked bottles in a basket."

The old creature hesitated, looking to the bishop for orders.

He nodded affirmatively, no one save Conn noticing the proceeding.

"Thanks for your kindness," she said, as she took the seat opposite Effie and her mother.

"One word more, Horrucks," exclaimed the bishop. "Are you going to leave me bound and helpless?"

"Yes. That boy'll roll over once or twice to where you are, and he can untie you."

"Another word, Horrucks! I hate to have you interfere with me in this way and mix up in my affairs. It's unkind, after all I've done for you. Go your ways in peace, and leave me in charge of those ladies, and I'll give you five thousand dollars more, making the ten thousand you asked for before we left the house."

"I'd do it, bishop, if you had the money here with you—"

"Well, I have," interrupted the bishop, eagerly.

"Nonsense. You're joking!"

"Not at all! I have it in my breast pocket."

"Let me see if you are telling the truth."

Horrucks proceeded to search the pocket in question.

"Sure enough!" he muttered, as he transferred the money to his own pocket. "I wouldn't have believed it without seeing it."

He sprung upon the box, seizing the reins.

"Come, boys!" he called.

His pals sprung up beside him.

"What—what are you going to do?" asked the horrified bishop.

"Don't you see, old pard? We're going to take a ride."

He chirped to the horses, turning the vehicle around, and then gently touched them with the whip.

Another instant, and the carriage was thundering away.

For a few moments Ruddle lay as if annihilated and then he turned feebly to Conn.

"You heard, boy, what he said about setting me free?" he queried.

"I did, bishop."

"Well, suppose you try it?"

"I'll give you the first chance, bishop," answered Conn. "If you will set me free, I will return the favor."

The bishop comprehended.

The boy did not intend to trust him.

He himself must take the first step.

But he did not hesitate.

A few rolls brought him into such juxtaposition with Conn that he was able to release the boy's hands, and the rest was of course an easy matter.

"You'll have to excuse me till I release my friend, bishop," said Conn, as he gained his feet. "In fact, I must bring him to his senses before I can come to you."

He sprung down the bank and filled his hat with water, and then hastened to sprinkle Bert's face and temples.

This proceeding increased the groans of our hero rapidly, and he soon opened his eyes.

"Gone!" he cried, as he staggered to his feet, with a wild look around.

Sustaining him gently, Conn rapidly set forth the situation, and then gave the bishop his freedom.

Another minute, and the bishop was alone at the deserted mill, Bert and his young associate riding away at a gallop.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A BOLD UNDERTAKING.

NEAR the close of the following afternoon, a well-appointed stage-coach could have been seen traversing the Choka Pass, on the old Overland stage-road, not far from old Fort Ruby.

It was on its way from Summit to Huntington.

The driver, Nim Cogges, a native of London, long domiciled in Nevada, was talking very earnestly to his solitary passenger about the rivalry and strife which had lately been developed among the Mormons and Gentiles in that region.

This passenger was Colonel Hatton.

In accordance with the purpose he had announced to Bert, he had been looking for his wife and making arrangements at Summit and all along the line of the Eureka and Palisade Railroad for others to look for her, but not the least discovery had yet resulted from these efforts.

"It's jest as I tell you, Colonel 'Atton," Nim was saying, with an excitement which caused him to misplace his "aitches" in true cockney fashion. "I've lived 'ereabouts a dozen years, or halmost as long as I've been in the country, and I know 'em! As true's you're a living man, Colonel 'Atton, them blasted Mormons hain't bound to get possession of Nevada!"

"You think so, driver?" returned the passenger, as the stage continued to roll quietly on.

ward, following the windings of one of the most rugged portions of the Pass.

He not only seemed to find the picturesque language of the Americanized Londoner entertaining, but to also find considerable relief therein from the painful thoughts and anxieties crowding upon him.

"Know it, sir—know it," affirmed Nim, touching up his leaders, which began to show signs of fatigue. "Jest look at it! There's a big camp of them Mormons on Franklin Lake, of which bevery other man, while pretending to be a miner, is nothing less or more than a 'Son o' Thunder,' as they're called, whose real business is to clean out hobnoxious Gentiles. The intention of the Brigham crew is to take possession of the State. A few thousand votes cast judiciously 'll give Nevada to these conspirators. That done, hall them blarsted pligmists 'll move over the Utah line and become Nevadyans, and thus put a spoke in Uncle Sam's wheel, sence hUncle Sam has no right to interfere with the local h institutions of any State. See it?"

The silent passenger evidently did.

At any rate he nodded assent to Nim's observations.

"And they'll do it, too," added Nim, with an air of being personally offended. "Oh, yes—they'll creep in, and climb over, and crawl hunder, and carry their little p'intns in due time, and don't you forget it! Why, them Mawmons is heverywhere already. They've captured all of hUtah, two-thirds o' Nevada, half o' Ida'o, and large deestriacts in hArizona, New Mexico, and Californy. They've even bought several 'undred thousand hacres in Old Mexico, in the State of Chaw-waw-waw, or whatsomdever you choose to call it, and I 'ear they're now arriving at Castle Garden, in Yawk, at the rate of a thousand a day from hall parts of Europe."

"There's a great deal of truth in what you say, Mr. Coggles," returned the gloomy and taciturn passenger, changing his seat uneasily. "The 'Mormon Problem,' which has been settled so many times, and which so many are every day undertaking to settle, is certainly as far from a solution as ever."

"My beyes! 'ere's a go!" suddenly exclaimed Nim Coggles, as he started and peered ahead, drawing rein sharply.

"What's the trouble?" asked the passenger.

"Some hass 'as placed a log hacross the road," explained Nim.

The passenger started, looking out as the stage came to a halt.

His air was expectant and excited.

"But never mind," added Nim, securing his reins to the foot-rail. "I'll soon get down and shunt it."

He sprung down with an agility that would hardly have been expected of his burly figure, and stepped briskly toward the obstruction.

"I'll get down too a moment, Mr. Coggles," said the passenger, quietly, suiting his action to the word and springing lightly up a slight declivity and vanishing behind a dense group of bushes.

Here, in a snug covert, the colonel found himself face to face with a figure which seemed the exact counterpart of himself.

A twin-brother could not have presented a closer resemblance.

It was, in fact, as if the colonel had been facing his reflection in a mirror!

"There is trouble, then?" demanded the colonel, in a whisper almost shrinking from the wild eyes into which he found himself looking.

"Yes, sir," came in a strange, husky voice from Bert Tabor, for this "counterfeit presentment" of Colonel Hatton was our hero.

"No trace of my wife, I suppose?" pursued the colonel, hurriedly. "No news from Lillie?"

Bert gasped for breath.

How could he reveal what had taken place since he parted with the colonel? what he knew? what he had discovered?

"Speak, my dear boy! Avow the worst! You do not know where they are!"

"No, colonel. I do not know where they are," answered Bert, in a voice that seemed to come from far down his throat. "And you, sir? I see you have searched in vain."

"All in vain, Bert. But I think you have not told me all," and again the colonel fixed his gaze upon the wild eyes before him. "What would you say to me? Is there danger ahead? Some new plot on foot against me?"

"Yes, colonel," and now Bert seemed to rouse into new life. "A mile further on a dozen men are in waiting to hold up the stage and take you prisoner."

"Ah! you have discovered the plot? You have been among the conspirators? In their very camp, perhaps?"

"Yes, colonel."

It was only too true.

In his desperation he had not hesitated to confront the most dangerous risks, circulating in disguise in the Mormon Camp.

"They're 'Sons of Thunder,' of course?" pursued Colonel Hatton.

"Yes, sir. I was quite sure such a scheme was under foot, and am glad I thought of this way of getting speech with you before you fell into their hands."

"It is indeed fortunate," commented the colonel. "What shall we do? Engage the driver to take us to camp by a roundabout way—"

"No, colonel. Yonder is my horse, as fresh as a bird. Mount him and hasten to camp."

"And you, Bert?"

"As you see," replied Bert, smilingly, "I have disguised myself to take your place in the stage!"

"What! and go on?"

"Exactly!"

"And fall into the hands of those waiting cut-throats?"

"That's just what I mean to do, colonel," avowed Bert, in a voice from which there could be no appeal. "After the strange disappearance of your wife, and after this elaborate machination against you—"

"But they will kill you, my dear Bert, when they discover how you are tricking them."

"Perhaps not, colonel. In any case, I am going to take my chances. I want to know what they are driving at. Ten to one your missing wife has fallen into their hands, and I shall certainly make some important discovery."

"Oh, Bert!" groaned the colonel, "I cannot let you go to your death in this fashion! You are like a son to me! But for you I should have died of that wound from which I am recovering. Let me go on and encounter these men! I feel with you that important discoveries await us. But it is for me to confront these perils, and not for you. No, my dear boy—"

"Enough, colonel," interrupted Bert, whose blue eyes glowed eloquently. "You're not in fit condition for the work in hand. Just off your bed, and still as weak as a child from that terrible wound. Say no more, colonel! If I am destined to perish I could not die in a better cause. But I venture to hope that I shall be successful in this attempt to wring from these miscreants a portion of their secrets. Not another word, colonel. I am resolved to take your place in the stage. As you see, I have taken great pains to disguise myself to resemble you, and even Coggles will not detect the substitution?"

"I'm hall ready, colonel, when you are Nim," called from his box at this moment.

"All right, Mr. Coggles," responded the colonel. "I'll be there in a moment."

"There! go!" enjoined Bert, pushing Colonel Hatton toward the waiting horse. "Do not delay to see the end of my adventure, but get back to camp as soon as you can. Not a word more! Good-by for the present!"

And with this Bert wrung the colonel's hand, giving him a final impetus toward the horse to which he had called his attention.

"Well, well, Bert, I accept the sacrifice, since you will have it so," said Colonel Hatton, in a voice husky with emotion. "It's only another proof of your goodness, courage and devotion! But I cannot, cannot feel that a just God will allow you to be killed by those ruffians. May His mighty arm ever be around you!"

It was all he could say.

With a last sad nod of adieu, Bert had faced about and was sauntering quietly out into Nim's view and toward the waiting stage.

"It's all right now, colonel," called the driver from his perch, as he glanced at the approaching figure, without the least suspicion of the remarkable substitution which had been accomplished. "It's merely a joke of some lumberman!"

Bert bowed assent, and stepped nimbly into the waiting vehicle, taking possession of the seat just vacated by Colonel Hatton, and the stage began rolling anew toward its destination.

CHAPTER XLIII.

HOLDING UP THE WRONG MAN!

THE incident of the obstruction seemed to have left a disagreeable impression upon Coggles for he remained silent longer than was his wont, and appeared to be in a brown study.

"Oh, yes, it's a joke, colonel," he finally exclaimed, with a glance at his passenger, "but it's a joke I don't like. That log was heavy!"

Bert was well aware of the fact, since he had been obliged to convey it several rods to place it in the position where Nim had found it, but he merely nodded assent to the assertion.

"The fact is," continued Nim, in a somewhat aggrieved tone, "there's likely to be more hunder an accident of that sort than appears hon the surface!"

There was no gainsaying this proposition.

Once more Bert bowed gravely.

"Likely as not," added Nim, "such a trick may have been played on Cal Stevens the hother day, and something of the sort may be involved in Cal's mysterious disappearance. Of course you've 'eard that Cal is missing, colonel?"

"Yes, I've heard of it," returned Bert, "but I suppose no one really knows just what has happened?"

"No, colonel. But there's certainly something wrong in that matter. Cal is as straight as a string, and he never would have disappeared of his own will in such a singular fashion."

"I agree with you, Mr. Coggles."

The voice of Bert was such a clever imitation

of that of the colonel that Nim did not detect the least difference.

Nim continued to look thoughtful and aggrieved, as his horses came to a walk near one of the crests of the undulating road.

"Oh, yes, it's a joke," he repeated, with the air of speaking to himself. "But they better not repeat it, if they let me catch them hat it!"

"Halt, there!" was the cry that succeeded. Nim Coggles had driven stage too long in the wild West not to heed this stern command.

Especially under such circumstances. With ten or a dozen rifles leveled at him from the rocks and bushes lining the road!

"Hall right, gentlemen!" he answered, without even turning his head to note the exact whereabouts of the owner of that persuasive voice. "Alt it is, you see!"

And he straightened back upon the reins with the hearty energy to be expected of a man whose life was at stake.

The stage having come to a standstill, the leader of the waylayers emerged from his concealment and approached it, with a nod of recognition to Coggles, and an inquiring glance at the solitary passenger, who was looking from the interior of the vehicle.

"No nonsense, if you please, gentlemen," he enjoined, with his hand upon a revolver. "I've a dozen men here, and you had better deal with me than with them!"

At the same instant four of his men sprung out of the bushes and took the four horses by their bits.

The faces of these men, like that of their leader, were covered with black crape, each showing merely a gleaming pair of eyes.

"Perhaps you've heard of me, Mr. Coggles," resumed the leader. "I'm the well-known Cap'n Dash, and I've urgent business with you and your passenger. Throw us down your ribbons, Nim, and be lively about it!"

The driver complied, with an air of disgust.

"They're not reg'lar road-agents," he muttered, in an aside, as he leaned over the right end of his seat and exchanged glances with the solitary occupant of the interior. "Some o' them Mawmons, no doubt! Some o' them prowlin' Sons o' Thunder," colonel!"

"You don't know this man, do you?" whispered the passenger, hurriedly.

"No more'n I know Adam and Eve, sir! The name's doubtless put on with that bit of crape which hides his ugly phiz!"

The reins having been gathered up by the four men referred to, the stage was taken a hundred yards along the pass, under close escort, to a point where a lateral opening presented itself, and then a score of rods in the new direction, coming to a halt in a depression that was protected from observation by both rock and wood.

"There! We can now exchange ideas without being molested by any chance tramp or traveler," said Captain Dash, as he again presented himself to the regards of the passenger and his driver. "You may get down, Nim."

Coggles hastened to avail himself of this permission, but not without saying in another aside to his passenger:

"Mawmons, sure enough! And they're after you, Colonel 'Atton!"

Captain Dash took a few steps toward the road, as if to assure himself that no indiscreet eye had followed the stage and its captors, and then he came back to Coggles.

"You're armed, I presume, Nim?" he resumed, with searching glances.

"No, pard," replied Nim. "Why harmed? What can one man do ag'inst a dozen? Besides, I've never known a driver to be misused who had the sense to obey orders—"

"No matter about all that, Nim," interrupted Captain Dash, hurriedly. "We've no time to waste. If you remain quiet and silent, just where you stand, n harm will come to you. Here, boys."

Captain Dash made a gesture to a couple of his men, who at once took the driver into custody.

Others of the band were already unhitching and unharnessing the horses.

With another gesture to the balance of his men, Captain Dash advanced to the stage, in a corner of which sat the solitary passenger, who had noted keenly the progress of events, but who had neither moved nor spoken.

"Of course you are the object of these attentions, Colonel Hatton," said Captain Dash, with suppressed jubilation. "It's our painful duty to interrupt your journey. In fact, you are our prisoner until further orders. No violence will be shown you, however, if you do not resist us or attempt to escape."

Bert answered these remarks with a nod of comprehension, congratulating himself that his disguise was favored by the shadows of the forest, and especially upon the fact that the shades of evening were about to descend upon the earth.

"No doubt you're armed, colonel?" pursued Captain Dash. "But no doubt, too, you have realized that you haven't much show to drop a dozen of us before we can handle you!"

"Only fools throw their lives away, sir," returned Bert, tersely. "The wise man bows to the inevitable, and bides his time."

"I knew you were that sort of a man, colonel," said the leader of the outlaws. "So, all you have to do, at the moment, is to hand me your revolver and get out of the stage!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

VERY SINISTER PROCEEDINGS.

BERT TABOR had no intention of disobeying either of the injunctions to which we left him subjected.

In the desperate mood which had come over him since the capture of Effie and her mother by Bullion Red and his pals, our hero cared very little for the imminence of the perils which had gathered around him.

Quietly handing his revolver to Captain Dash, he alighted with the calm dignity to be expected of a man with the colonel's reputation, as also with the slowness and feebleness of movement which had been characteristic of the colonel ever since the reception of his terrible wound.

Placing his prisoner under guard, Captain Dash again gave his attention to Coggles, whose arm he drew within his own, conducting him beyond the hearing of his followers and the captured passenger.

"You get four hundred and fifty dollars a year for driving stage, I believe, Coggles?" resumed Captain Dash, as he came to a halt and faced Nim, relinquishing his arm.

"That's jest what I get," acknowledged the driver, his countenance expressing intense wonder that the questioner should know the exact figures.

"Well, I know a party who wishes to give you a cool thousand a year," pursued the unknown. "What do you say to that?"

"Simply that I'm his man, sir."

"Good. Such being the case, the party in question desires to pay you a year in advance, and here's the amount in ready cash—a thousand dollars."

"Is—is it for driving stage, pard?" asked Nim, flushing with delight, as he pocketed the money. "Merely for driving stage? There's no murder nor nothing of that sort expected?"

"It's merely for doing as you're told, Nim," declared Captain Dash. "You're of English birth, I hear, and would doubtless like to see the 'old country' again. At least you've often said so. Well, I want you to cross the ocean and take a long tour in England and Scotland. In fact, take a good vacation, as if you were a clergyman, or a millionaire."

Nim uttered a prolonged whistle. He had never been so astonished as that moment.

"What! and not work hat all!" he ejaculated.

"That's just what is wanted of you, Nim," assured the unknown blandly, "and you'll have just a thousand a year for playing gentleman and doing nothing."

Nim looked still more bewildered.

"But, hafter all," he soon reflected aloud, "if I spend my money in that way, there'll be nothing left for my wife and children."

"That point has of course received our attention," returned Captain Dash. "An allowance of fifty dollars a month will be paid regularly to Mrs. Coggles during the whole period of your absence. This will make sixteen hundred in a year for both of you, and what have you to do for the money?"

"Yes, that's what I'd like to know," returned Nim wonderingly. "What ham I to do?"

"You've simply to keep your mouth shut in regard to all that has happened to you, or is happening, upon this last trip," replied Captain Dash. "You will answer no questions and give no information in regard to what is being done here. You will not admit that you have ever seen Colonel Hatton, or that he was a passenger with you this morning. In a word, you will get out of the country secretly and as soon as you can, and so get out of the way of all inquiries, and be seen no more in this country for a year to come."

Nim stared in silent wonder.

He did not fail to notice, however, that a fire was being kindled under the stage, and he could not help asking the meaning of this extraordinary proceeding.

"It means simply that we propose to wipe the stage out of existence!" was the captain's answer.

"And the 'osses?"

"We'll take charge of them."

"And my mail and Express matter?"

"Oh, we've already looked after those little points," declared Captain Dash. "You need not give yourself the least uneasiness about them."

Nim began to see that he was a party to a very sinister piece of business.

He thought of the disappearance of Cal Stevens, and a vague terror crept into his soul.

"Of course I can't force you to accept our liberality," added Dash, with a quiet gesture to two of his men which caused them to saunter toward him, "but I hope you are wise enough to know a good thing when you see it."

Nim reflected rapidly.

He did not like the pressure that was being applied to him, but what good could resistance bring him?

He realized that Colonel Hatton was the object of some profound machination, but what could he do to aid him?

The result of these cogitations appeared promptly on his gloomy features.

"You accept, then?" queried the unknown.

"Yes, I haccept, pard," was the answer.

"Then step this way, Nim. I'll furnish you with a new suit of clothes and a horse."

Captain Dash led the way to an adjacent thicket, where a horse was in waiting, duly saddled and bridled, and also a large bundle of new clothing, which had evidently been made or selected upon the driver's measure.

"Lively," enjoined the unknown, as he placed these things at Nim's disposal.

The old suit was promptly discarded and the new one put on—much to the edification of a concealed watcher, whose nose could have been seen once or twice amid the foliage of an adjacent thicket.

"Here's a further disguise for you, Nim," then said Captain Dash, producing a parcel from his breast pocket. "A wig and a false beard. By putting these on you will avoid recognition by your friends, and there'll be no occasion to answer any questions as to where you're going!"

"But where ham I going?" demanded Coggles, as he proceeded to assume the wig and beard, which made him look at least twenty years older than he was.

"You'll take the 7:35 eastward Express tomorrow evening," replied his mentor. "As you've got a whole day in which to get to Elko, you can go leisurely, and had better stay overnight at some farm-house near here. Leave the horse at the Depot Hotel, in Elko, for Mr. Leaveitt, whose card I hand you, and Mr. Leaveitt will call for it. You'll go direct to New York, and there take the first steamer that sails for Liverpool or London."

"But Mrs. Coggles? What ham I to say to her?"

"Nothing whatever—just at present."

"Not even that I've got a chance to visit my hold 'ome, as so long desired?" asked Nim, as he swung himself into the saddle.

"Not even that, Nim. I will tell her where you're going, and how long you'll be gone, and all about it. A year hence, you must be at Feather's Inn, Clayton Square, Liverpool, in accordance with the written directions I now hand you"—he suited his action to the word—"and there you will find a handsome remittance, with full instructions as to your future course."

"But you really mean for me to come back, pard?" asked Coggles, as he bent a ke glance upon his tempter, and another upon his stage, which was being literally devoured by a huge fire, the material for which had been accumulated beforehand. "You mustn't expect me to stay away from my wife and children forever!"

"Certainly not, Nim," assured Captain Dash.

"You shall come back in a year, and your wife may write you in the mean time as often as she likes, at the hotel indicated, so that you will have no uneasiness about her or the children. You may also write to her when you feel like it, but without any allusions to these secrets. You see how reasonable I am, Nim, and I hope you're now willing to take the well-earned vacation this momentous you."

"I'm not hardly willing, pard, but delighted at the chance," declared Coggles, gathering up his reins. "Good by, pard. I hope you won't regret your money."

"Good by, Nim. Ride along this gully another hundred yards, and you'll come out on a trail which I'll bring you in due course to the depot in Elko. Take good care of yourself, and don't worry in the least about Mrs. Coggles and the children. I'll have her write tomorrow, so that her letter will reach England almost as soon as you do."

Nim Coggles took the hand offered him, and then rode quietly away in the direction indicated, and in another moment had vanished from the view of Captain Dash among the rocks and bushes by which the gully he was traversing was obstructed.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE TWO STAGE-DRIVERS.

WITH what wondering curiosity Nim Coggles thus turned his back upon his passenger and Captain Dash will be readily imagined.

But a greater surprise was before him.

As he reached the trail to which his tempter had alluded he found himself intercepted by a man on horseback, who was evidently awaiting his coming.

"Hello, Nim," greeted this horseman. "Those clothes fit you nicely, and that wig is as fancy as your beard; but you can't hide your manly beauty from me!"

Nim drew rein abruptly.

A first-class earthquake would have surprised him considerably less than did this bantering observation.

What could he do?

Deny his identity? or quarrel with the stranger on general principles?

"Who the deuce here you?" he demanded.

"And 'ow did you know I'm Nim Coggles?"

"I saw you changing your skin yonder, near your burning stage," explained the horseman. "In fact, I was near enough to overhear the edifying remarks with which this change was accompanied."

The horseman was indeed the concealed watcher of whom we have spoken.

After witnessing the scene we have described he had glided away just ahead of Nim until both were beyond the hearing of Captain Dash.

"Well, that beats me," muttered Nim, hardly knowing whether to treat the matter lightly or seriously. "Your voice reminds me of Cal Stevens, but your face is not Cal's by a long chalk! Will you tell me who you are?"

"I'll peel if you will, Nim, since nobody's looking."

"Hit's a bargain!"

Nim took off his false beard and wig, and the horseman followed his example.

"Cal Stevens, true's preaching!" exclaimed Nim, in a guarded tone, with a keen glance around. "But what are you doing in that disguise, Cal?"

"Just about what you're doing in yours, Nim," answered Cal Stevens, who was another well-known and popular stage-driver, and who had long been Nim's most intimate companion. "In a word, just what has happened to you to-day, Nim, happened to me a week ago yesterday."

"What! you were held up by Captain Dash?"

"I was!"

"And—and your passenger captured?"

"Just so, Nim."

"And you were bribed to leave Hamerica?"

"Just like you, Nim."

Coggles looked as if a rattlesnake had sounded an alarm beside him.

"The only difference in the two cases," added Cal Stevens, as he resumed his wig and false beard, "is that my passenger was a lady!"

"A lady, Cal?"

"Yes, Nim. And another curious fact is that the lady was Mrs. Hatton, the wife of the colonel, who had come on from the East to join him!"

Again Nim Coggles looked as if a thrill of terror had traversed his entire body.

"Let's get out of this," he proposed, nervously. "Hi want to talk with you."

He resumed progress quietly, replacing the wig and beard he had assumed, and Cal Stevens followed his example, riding beside him.

Nothing more was said until they were at least a hundred rods from the scene of the supposed colonel's capture and at a sheltered and retired spot which afforded them the sense of security they needed.

"Yes, I've been through this mill ahead of you," then said Cal Stevens, as he slipped to the ground. "Dash and his men stopped me on the Elko road and took Mrs. Hatton prisoner. Then Dash had with me about such an interview as he has just had with you, offering me a thousand dollars to go to the Sandwich Islands and be gone a year."

"And you haccepted?"

"I didn't dare do otherwise. I think the villain would have murdered me on the spot if I had refused. But my resolution was taken to remain hereabouts and spot them. With a new suit of clothes, and a new wig and beard, I quietly took possession of a mining-shanty, in a deserted mine of the Humboldt Range, and have been watching ever since to see what would be the next link in the chain."

"Of course you were missed, Cal," observed Coggles, as he also dismounted. "Your horses were found making their way homeward without a driver, and a dozen rumors arose as to what had become of you. Some hinted at a sunstroke which had caused you to wander off to parts unknown. Others declared that you had taken a sudden notion to go East or West, while another report had it that you had suddenly been taken ill and been obliged to stop off at a farm-house."

"All of which is gammon," avowed Cal. "As you can see with half an eye, Nim, there is some deep scheme on foot against Colonel Hatton and his wife, who are now both prisoners. Have you any idea who these rascals are?"

"Hi can only suppose that they're some o' them blasted Mawmons who've been raising the Old Scratch so long on Franklin Lake," replied Nim. "Did you notice that snakeering, with di'min' heyes, on the finger o' Cap'n Dash?"

"Yes, I noticed it—his hands, too. They're as plump and soft as the hands of a lady. That chap don't drive stage for a living, as I knows of, or ride a broncho. What an idea, to barn that stage! To cause everything to disappear, both man and thing! It's as much as to say that they mean to wipe out all record of to-day's trip. I think they'd have killed you, if you hadn't agreed to go away, Nim!"

"No doubt, Cal. I saw it in the heyes o' that smooth, palavering devil. I'm sorry for the colonel! They mean to be rough on him!"

"That's clear enough," returned Cal, as his troubled glance settled in the direction of the scene of Bert Tabor's captivity. "I wouldn't be in the colonel's place, pard, for all the gold and silver in the world!"

"Nor Hi, Cal," said Nim.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THEIR PLAN OF ACTION.

THE thoughts of the two stage-drivers lingered upon the situation of the prisoner, as was natural.

"Pity such a man as Colonel 'Atton should be murdered by them Mawmons," resumed Nim, after a pause.

"And what a shame it'd be for us to go back on him, pard!" returned Cal Stevens. "You've no intention of taking that voyage across the ocean, I suppose?"

"Not the least, Cal. 'Ave you?"

"No more'n I intend to emigrate to the Cannibal Islands!"

"It looks to me, you see, Cal, as if it were our bounden duty to remain 'ere until the colonel's out of the clutches of his enemies, if that day's ever booked to come," added Nim, earnestly.

"I agree with you, Nim. But you'll need to discard the clothes and the disguises furnished by Cap'n Dash, as I've done. He'd know 'em at sight. We must fit up all new. Take a drink from this flask, while we reflect a little as to our best course, and then tell me what we're to do."

"Hi don't need to chaw on this question as long as it takes to say *seat*!" was Nim's rejoinder, as he proceeded to do justice to the liquid refreshment offered him. "You know where the Ruby Cave is, a mile south and west of the Gentile camp?"

"I ought to, pard. I've spent many a day there, looking for rubies."

"The same 'ere. You must remember that there are places in the rear of that cavern where leverything is as light and clean and pleasant as any room at a hotel."

Cal Stevens assented.

"I've spent many a night there," he said.

"Hi, too! It's jest the place we want for our boarding-house for the next few days. We shall be near the Gentile camp and hear all that's said about the colonel's disappearance. Possibly, too, we may be able to do something for the colonel's rescue."

"Of course, pard, and have help at hand in case we should need it. It's fully agreed, then? We'll hide in the Ruby Cave?"

"Yes," returned Nim. "We'll remain disguised, but it shall be in wigs and beards of our own selection. We'll go to Helko during the night, sence this 'ess must be left there for Leavitt, as ordered, to keep them Mawms in ignorance of the fact that we've concluded to remain in Hamerica."

"And once in town, we can of course get a complete outfit of hair and war-paint," suggested Cal. "Let's mount and be off."

The two men mounted, but Nim Coggles hesitated so long to stir that Cal Stevens bestowed a more critical glance upon him.

"You're not afraid of being seen, I hope?" he said, indicating with a wave of the hand the darkness which was deepening around them.

"No, Cal. Hit's another idee than that!"

"Out with it, then. This ought to be an hour for confidence and plain speaking, pard," declared Stevens.

"Hand for plain hacting, too, old boy," avowed Nim Coggles, as he tore off his false beard and wig, and sprung to the ground, grinding them under his heel. "Some'ow I feel with them things on as if I were somebody's strange-looking and strayed cuss! Mind's made up, Cal—fully! I've lived all these years 'thout being anybody's sneaking, prowling, double-headed and nameless pig in a poke, and I'm too hold to begin now!"

"You mean, then—"

"I mean that Nim Coggles has never been ashamed o' his figgerhead," growled the veteran driver, "and that he hints to stick to it jest as long as he sticks to hanting!"

"Good!" commented Cal Stevens, as he removed his false hair and threw it into the adjacent bushes. "If your mind's made up not to go into hiding, I'm quite ready to take that course with you. Here we are, then, in our proper harness. What's the next thing to hitch to?"

"Why, we'll go to the Gentile camp, as straight as these 'osses can carry us, and let the boys know what has 'appened to the colonel."

The suggestion went straight to the heart and brain of Cal Stevens.

"I'm with you," he declared. "Let's do what we can."

"To begin with, you must be able to lead the way out of these woods," suggested Nim. "If so, the sooner you set up in that line the better."

"Follow me, then."

The couple were soon making for the old emigrant stage road—Cal leading the way—although this course took them very near the spot where Nim's long interview with Captain Dash had taken place, and where the captors of the colonel were still busy.

But suddenly Nim halted.

"See anything 'spicious?" asked Cal Stevens, hurriedly. "Is anything wrong?"

"Well—yes," answered Nim, slowly. "We ought to peep in on these villains and see what they propose doing with Colonel 'Atton!"

"It's risky business, Nim," returned Cal, "but if you choose to take your chances—"

"Come on, then. I'm willing to take a very considerable risk to give them 'Sons of Thunder' a set-back."

The couple changed their course sufficiently to make it conform to their new intentions, and went on some time in silence.

"You alluded to my being familiar with this neighborhood," at length resumed Cal. "You'd think I ought to know a thing or two if you knew what tramping I've done during the past week in these mountains. The wandering Jew is anchored fast by comparison!"

"What a thicket we're in now, Cal!" muttered Nim. "Must be getting near the Mawms, too!"

"Yes. I'm going to leave you here, Nim, in charge of the horses," said Cal, as he slipped to the ground. "Wait here for me!"

And Cal glided away swiftly in the direction of the glare on the sky, which pointed out the whereabouts of Captain Dash and his men.

CHAPTER XLVII.

BERT AND HIS CAPTORS.

IN the mean time how had Bert Tabor fared in the rôle he had so daringly assumed?

As we have intimated, night was at hand at the moment of his capture, and this circumstance was not a little in his favor, the gathering shadows keeping out of sight the actual differences and contrasts his aspect really presented to that of the man for whom he had been taken.

Curiously enough, Bert was really favored by the light of the fire which had been kindled to burn the stage-coach.

The glare and glow of its beams, as it fell upon his powdered eyebrows and painted face, caused him to present that ghastly and wasted appearance which his captors were prepared to find in the real colonel.

No suspicion of the truth in the case seems to have occurred to any of the outlaws, not even to the couple who were so closely guarding him.

Not a word was addressed to him until Nim Coggles had been got rid of in the manner related, and Captain Dash had given some attention to the proceedings of his men, and then he came back to the prisoner.

"I hope you're not getting tired of waiting for me, colonel," he remarked.

"Not at all," returned Bert, still imitating the voice of the man he was personating.

"Sit down, sir," pursued Dash, with a wave of the hand toward a projecting stone, as he took possession of another. "I have a few words to say to you while the boys are finishing their affairs, and we may as well make ourselves comfortable."

Bert complied with the invitation.

"Will you smoke, Colonel Hatton?" continued Captain Dash, extending some cigars toward Bert.

Bert declined, with thanks.

"Would you like anything to eat or drink, sir?" pursued Dash, as he proceeded to select one of the cigars and light it.

The supposed colonel shook his head.

"As you see, sir," resumed Dash, after two or three puffs. "I am disposed to allow you all the liberty I can consistent with your safe-keeping. After the siege you have lately been through, you must feel pretty pale about the gills, although you seemed to be handy enough with your rifle on the lake-shore yesterday. My intention is not to handcuff you until you get quarrelsome, and not to attach you to anything until you show some intention of running away!"

"I appreciate the consideration you show me, captain," returned Bert, "but it's no more than I will do for you when our positions are reversed."

"Just so—when they are reversed," exclaimed Captain Dash, with a laugh. "Many 'moons' will doubtless roll over our heads before that happy day will dawn for you. But to business. Are you anxious to know why we have taken this liberty with you?"

"The question has presented itself, I admit," replied Bert. "But I had not thought of importuning you for this information. You'll talk when you feel like it, no doubt."

The attitude of the prisoner was as nonchalant as his voice.

Bert was really taking things coolly.

Left in possession of his personal liberty of action, he felt adequate to the exercise of considerable volition in all the scenes which might grow out of the schemes of his captors.

"Well, I am bound to be frank with you," resumed Dash. "Yesterday we had the old Piute chief in our hands—"

"Who's 'we,' if you please?" interrupted Bert.

"The whole body of the Mormons in Nevada, as represented by their leaders."

"Thanks, captain. I can now place you. Go on. You were saying that you had the old Piute chief in your hands yesterday—"

"And consequently we hoped to learn from him where his people find rubies, and where is the lost silver mine. But he has now made his escape, and may evade recapture for some days to come, although we're sure to have him sooner or later, as these red-skins are too few in number to offer any serious opposition to us."

"But what have I to do with all this?" demanded Bert.

"Why, as we are in a fair way to fail of getting the desired information from Mee-an-kah, we are compelled to turn our attention to you!"

"To me? And why to me?"

"Because you are just as well posted about all these matters as the red chief himself," explained Captain Dash, with smiling impressiveness. "You were adopted many years ago as a son by Mee-an-kah, who took a great liking to you. He told you all his secrets. You know where the lost mine is, and where rubies are to be had by the barrel. It is believed at the Mormon camp that Mee-an-kah has declared you his successor, that you have adopted his daughter; that it was by your advice and influence that the young chief, Teecomo, went abroad; and that the only consideration which keeps you and such men as Bert Tabor here is the fact that you are secretly shipping eastward and westward every day thousands and tens of thousands of dollars in rubies and bullion."

Bert could not help being amused.

"Why, you must think that we're in a fair way to demoralize all the treasure-markets of the world," he said.

"Yes, that's what we think," avowed Captain Dash emphatically. "We know you wouldn't stay here over night, if you hadn't pumped that old Piute chief completely dry of all his secrets!"

Bert would have laughed under almost any other circumstances.

"This is a clear case of professional jealousy," he said, "and I'm frank enough to add that there is not the least foundation for it. Mee-an-kah has never given me a particle of information about a ruby placer, nor about any lost mine. We know nothing of any such 'find' as you are pleased to give us credit for. And I may as well add, now and here, that if you have robbed me of my liberty with the intention of forcing me to give you any information about the mines of the Piutes, you are barking up the wrong tree. I've no information of the sort, none whatever."

Captain Dash stared at his prisoner a few moments, as if he thought him an excellent actor.

"You'll have to excuse me, colonel, for doubting your word," he then declared. "It's perfectly certain that you must have some secret reason for remaining at the Gentile camp. I'd be willing to bet a thousand dollars against a cent that there is not a single claim on Ruby Lake which is paying expenses!"

"Admitted. But what of that? We're living on hope, as is usually the case with miners!"

"I should think as much! Such stuff as you have on the dumps tells the story. You've been running behindhand for weeks. Your smelter shut down last Tuesday, and not a fire has been kindled since. I hear some of you have got desperate and gone to panning, but did not get a color. The old pay-streaks have all played out, and no new ones have been discovered. You see how closely we watch you!"

Bert nodded understandingly.

He now knew at least one of the reasons why so many attempts had been made for the capture of Colonel Hatton.

The Mormons believed him to be the possessor of the secret of fabulous millions, and were eager to force him to share this knowledge with them.

As much was shown by the next observation of Captain Dash:

"What we want, therefore, is for you to tell us where the treasure is, and allow us to share it with you."

"But I tell you, Captain Dash, that we have no such knowledge as you ascribe to us," protested our hero, "and that it is impossible for me to accede to your wishes."

Captain Dash smiled twice in rapid succession, the first time in scorn and incredulity, and the second in anger.

"I am sorry to see that you have received my considerate treatment in such a spirit," he declared, as he arose, with vengeful glances at the prisoner. "But since you have taken this course, you need not complain if I modify my conduct and at once order you into close confinement."

Bert arose quietly, moving a step or two nearer.

"You can do what you please," he said, "but I will at least know who you are!"

He extended his hand, stepping still nearer, and tore the crape from the captain's features, which were thus plainly revealed in the fire-light.

"Ah! as I supposed!" added Bert. "Captain Dash is merely another name for Smith Ruddle!"

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A FEW MASKS TOO MANY.

THE aggressive movement of Bert Tabor was not at all relished by Smith Ruddle, as could have been seen by his features, which became fiery red.

"Curse you! I ought to shoot you on the spot," he said, savagely.

"Perhaps you had better," returned Bert. "I am not likely to be surprised at anything that is done by the son of Norman Daggett!"

It was evident that the villain snared his father's secret.

His face became as pale as it had been flushed a moment before.

He glared murderously at the supposed colonel, while his hand toyed nervously with the handle of his revolver.

But he was not long in obtaining the control of his passions.

"I will attend to your case in due course, colonel," he said, stirring vigorously with a stick the embers of the fire which had wiped out Nim's stage. "In the mean time, as the fire is about out, and the night has fully set in, I think I'm allowing you a great deal more liberty than you deserve. Seize him, Yardley, and tie his hands behind him!"

Bert was strongly tempted to lay hold of Smith Ruddle, then and there, and use him as a flail to crush his two keepers to the earth, as a preliminary toward making his escape—as he could have readily done—but he had the strength of soul to withstand this temptation.

The truth was, he had not yet obtained all the information he wanted, which he had come there to seek.

His intention was substantially that of a man who has smuggled himself into the midst of his enemies, and he disliked to retire until he had reaped some further reward for his daring.

To his surprise, the man addressed as Yardley did not take the trouble to execute the order which had been given him.

"No need of any such fuss about him, Cap," was the fellow's response. "Let me guard him in my own way. It is enough that I am responsible for him!"

Evidently Smith Ruddle knew his man better than he knew our disguised hero.

"All right," he responded. "But look sharp with the old man. I can see already that we shall find him no chicken!"

"But where are we going with him, Cap," supplemented Yardley.

"To Deadhill," was the answer. "I thought that was understood."

"To Deadhill?" repeated Bert, mentally. "I wonder if that is a hill in which I shall get planted?"

As if the mention of that name had conjured up visions in Smith Ruddle's soul which made him better natured, he turned to our hero and resumed:

"You have heard of the place of course, colonel, and I don't mind giving you a brief idea of the surprises which await you in that direction. To begin with, you will see there Mrs. Hatton and your daughter!"

The tone of the reprobate was such that Bert could not question his sincerity.

"How can that be?" he asked. "All trace of them was lost to us from the moment when Bullion Red and his pals drove them away in a carriage from the deserted mill!"

Such had indeed been the case.

Bert and Conn had looked in vain for the outlaws and their captives, and had finally separated—Conn to continue the search with other assistance, and Bert to look after the colonel's return from his trip westward, and to send out new searchers from the Gentile camp.

"Oh, that's because your darling Bert Tabor and that infernal stable-boy of the Pass-no-pass Tavern didn't go to work in the right way," explained Smith Ruddle, complacently. "Their idea seems to have been that Bullion Red and his gang would fly as direct to the hills as possible!"

"And didn't they?"

"No. They turned into the first bit of woods they came to and laid low there, while Tabor and Conn rode on and on until they were miles from the actual roost of Red and his pals!"

"What a pity!"

"Oh, but worse is to come. The bishop had taken Red's measure, and knew where to look for him. Just then, too, my father had the good luck to encounter a dozen of our miners from the camp who had been looking for Tabor. You can see from these two circumstances, colonel, just what followed. Bullion Red and his pals were captured before they had ventured to emerge from their hiding-place, or even draw a long breath, and Mrs. Hatton thus found herself restored to the hands of the bishop, with no other consolation than the fact that she was accompanied by her darling daughter!"

Such was indeed the way in which the bishop had been favored, and in which events had transpired subsequent to the encounter at the deserted mill.

Bert could not repress a groan.

"So you see that we are still the masters of the situation," added Smith, with a malicious

chuckle. "Your wife is at the mercy of the governor, and your daughter at mine!"

The fingers of our hero itched to be at the ruffian's throat.

But he restrained himself, desiring to know more.

"And what about Bullion Red and his pals?" he asked.

"Oh, their goose is cooked," answered Smith, with a sincerity as evident as his frankness.

"The bishop had scarcely overpowered them, and bound them hand and foot, when along came Sheriff Atwell, who has been hunting them for weeks, it seems, so that my father had nothing further to do with them than to turn them over to the sheriff and his posse! Ha, ha! Here comes in the best joke of the season. The bishop not only recovered from the outlaws ten thousand dollars, in addition to a pair of horses and a carriage, of which they had robbed him, but he will also get the five thousand dollars' reward which has so long been offered for the arrest of the daring criminals!"

Bert drew a sigh of relief.

It was a positive satisfaction to know that Effie and her mother were no longer at the mercy of Bullion Red and his pals.

"And so Sheriff Atwell has possession of those ruffians now?" he asked.

"Yes, and he has already started for Elko with them," replied Smith. "Of course the rascals will try to blacken the good name of the bishop, but the fact that he has captured them will be a sufficient answer to all their aspersions."

Bert was silent.

For several minutes his attention had been attracted, and not a little interested, by the fact that the masks, or the men with crape on their faces, had notably increased near him.

He had noticed several of these men emerging from the shadows encircling the scene, and had even asked himself if they were crowding nearer to kill him.

Certainly, so far as he could judge, he was the center of their regards and even of their movements.

"But fall in, boys!" suddenly added Smith Ruddle. "The stage is wholly wiped out, with the exception of its iron and that can hardly be sworn to in any court of justice. Fall in, all! We have been here too long already."

The men hastened to comply.

"Upon the whole, Yardley," added Smith, "I must insist on a little more care for the colonel's safe-keeping. The way is rough, and it will be rather dark as soon as we're away from the glow of these ashes. Better tie his hands behind him, and pass a rope from one ankle to the other after you have placed him in the saddle."

"All right, sir," returned Yardley.

A couple of masked men had advanced promptly to Bert, as if to execute Smith's orders, and they even made a pretense of binding him, but our hero readily saw that they were not doing and did not intend to do anything of the sort.

In fact, their hands sought his in such significant pressures that he was compelled to see that they were his friends.

"Ah, it's you!" he whispered, in the ear of one of these new-comers, as he found himself placed astride of a horse.

"Yes, Bert!"

The speaker was Conn!

"And that other man?"

"He is Landlord Crippitt, of the Pass-no-pass Tavern! That man near Smith is Cal Stevens, the missing stage-driver, and this one behind us is Nim Coggles. There are five 'recruits' here, who were not here when the stage was held up!"

"And how are things?"

"Simply lovely! Have neither fear nor anxiety. All the crookedness of these Ruddles will be duly straightened at Deadhill."

With what a profound joy of soul Bert clasped Conn's hand in the darkness need not be stated.

In another minute the cavalcade was in motion, with Smith at its head and Yardley and the bulk of the outlaws in the rear, while Bert occupied the center of the scene, duly "guarded" by Conn on one hand and Landlord Crippitt on the other.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A SURPRISE FOR THE RUDDLES.

THE story of Deadhill?

There is nothing more tragic in the entire history of Nevada.

The spot lies far up in the Humboldt Range, toward the source of the creek which comes down past the Mormon camp.

In the early days of the mining excitement a score of men had taken possession of the little valley late one fall, and had found both silver and gold in such quantities that they literally lost their heads over their labors.

Of course their provisions were soon exhausted, but even then they suspended operations only long enough to kill a deer or a bear, and

nothing further was thought of supplies until the last mouthful of meat had vanished.

In due course the ammunition went the way of all the food, and then a veritable panic of helplessness and hunger took possession of the miners.

One or two had fallen seriously ill, and the balance were willing enough to let them die, with the idea of inheriting the treasure they had accumulated, but the others called a meeting and tried to choose a deputation whose duty it should be to descend into the foot-hills and plains and intercept some fleet of prairie-schooners, with a view to the purchase of the necessary provisions and ammunition.

Easier said than done!

Nobody wished to serve on the deputation!

Nobody desired to turn his back for even a couple of days upon his treasure.

The first day of the convention was spent in wrangling, and the second closed with all the promise of a fight, in which the hand of every man was to be raised against all his fellows.

The third day the camp was visited by a terrible epidemic which left at least half of its occupants too helpless and weak to crawl from shelters.

The fourth day—

But we draw a veil over the scenes that succeeded, and which can be only too readily imagined.

Disease and starvation, with murder and cannibalism, in all its horrors, were not long in doing their work.

Later, a wandering band of Indians had looked in upon the scene, their attention attracted by the flight of vultures and the retreat of coyotes and wolves.

These savages had carried off all the treasure accumulated by the unfortunate and foolish miners, but had given to the ghastly skeletons which strewed the little valley no other attention than a contemptuous glance.

From that day the spot had been shunned by whites and reds alike.

For years no human being had been found bold enough to visit it.

Two or three times a hunter or other stranger had stumbled upon the spot by accident, but only to flee from it in the wildest imaginable horror.

Who first gave the name of Deadhill to the scene of this tragedy, is unknown, but it had taken a firm hold, because of its appropriateness, and had become known to a wide distance round about.

Such was the spot of which Smith Ruddle and his father had taken possession.

Here they fancied themselves secure from all pursuit and intrusion.

A dozen men had been left here, in armed possession, and also as a guard over Mrs. Hatton and Effie.

A camp-fire had been kindled in the center of the opening, without the least fear that its flames would be seen by an enemy, since an enemy would have been compelled to arrive at the very rim of the valley before he could look down into it.

Near this fire sat Effie and her mother—in what bowed and dejected attitudes, need not be stated.

Near them sat Bishop Ruddle, his ruddy face glowing still redder in the firelight falling upon it.

How like a ghoul he looked, now that the mask had fallen entirely from him!

"Yes, the facts are just as I tell you," he was saying, as he looked at his watch. "My son will soon be here with the colonel! The whole family is at my mercy! The consummation of the revenge I swore to have, Mrs. Hatton, when you drove me from your presence, is now at hand!"

The captives did not respond to these observations.

They neither complained nor pleaded.

They had said all they had to say to the monster who had them in his power, and were awaiting developments.

To be candid, they were not without hope.

They had faith alike in God and man, and could not doubt that the bishop and his son would soon be called to account for their cruelty and wickedness.

A signal suddenly resounded through the valley from one of the narrow paths by which it was reached, and Smith Ruddle came marching into the presence of his father, with a mien which indicated how well he was pleased with the situation.

"Put on more wood, boys, so that we can see what we are about," he cried, gayly, as he sprang from his saddle. "Dismount, all, and remain near at hand. By the way," and he looked around, with the air of being surprised at the number of his masked followers, "you may as well remove that crape from your faces, as we are no longer in danger of being seen by an enemy. Sit down here, Colonel Hatton, near your wife and daughter."

Bert had already alighted, and he hastened to say a few words to Effie and her mother.

How they started!

How they looked at him!

The glances of Smith Ruddle swept the illu-

minated circle in which he and his father were the central figures.

"I am glad to see, Smith," said the latter, "that you have made a success of your little excursion, just as you said you should. The colonel offered no resistance?"

"Not the least."

Again the glances of Smith swept the circle, and now his face flushed with anger.

All of the men save five had already removed the crape from their faces, and to these five Smith gave his especial attention.

"Did you not hear me?" he asked. "I told you to take that stuff from your faces."

The five men stared at him in silence, remaining motionless.

"All deaf, eh?"

Still not a word.

"Take off that crape!"

Not a hand was raised.

That strange stare was the only answer.

And still that strange quiet and silence.

"Here, you!" called Smith, angrily, as he pointed his finger at the nearest of the masked figures. "Come here!"

The man in question advanced quietly until he was within reach, when Smith extended his hand and tore the crape from his features.

"Destruction!" yelled the astonished ruffian, as his eyes rested upon the calm, stern face thus revealed. "It's Nim Coggles!"

"Hi won't deny it!" returned Nim, as another of the masked figures halted beside him. "And 'ere's Cal Stevens!"

Cal unmasked at the announcement.

"Great Scott! the pair of them!" exclaimed Smith Ruddle. "And good!"

He pointed at the third masked figure.

"Oh, I reckon you'll know me," answered the third intruder, as he slipped the bit of crape from his face. "Speak up like a man, if you do, Smith!"

"Landlord Crippitt!" gasped the startled ruffian, retreating. "Are you, sir?"

This was said to the fourth masked figure, who quietly removed his mask, disclosing the stern face of Teecomo.

"Worse and worse!" yelled Smith. "Look sharp, boys! Don't let these intruders get away! One more, or who are you?"

This was said to the fifth and last of the masked figures.

"Oh, I'm only Conn, of the Pass-no-pass tavern, Mr. Ruddle," answered the smiling stable-boy, as he removed the crape from his features. "I hope you'll be glad to see me again!"

"Death and furie! what does this mean?" asked Smith Ruddle, glaring around with furious men and glance. "Explain this matter, Colonel Hatton, or—"

"Oh, there is no need of threats," Mr. Ruddle interrupted Bert, in his natural voice, as he stopped toward the consternated ruffian. "You are the victim of a surprise—that's all!"

"A surprise, Colonel Hatton!"

"Oh, there's no Colonel Hatton here," said Bert, as he removed his false beard and wig, and drew a moist handkerchief over his face a few times rapidly. "Colonel Hatton is safe at home, where his wife and daughter will soon be safe with him—"

"And you?" yelled Smith, and the bishop in chorus.

"Oh, I am merely Bert Taber," answered the hero, as his smiling face appeared in all its glad radiance and triumph. "And as to you, father and son, of the tribe of Norman Daggett, and better known as Ruddle, you are both my prisoners, and don't you move hand or foot, if you desire to live a moment longer!"

Bert fired a revolver into the air as he ceased speaking.

And even as the bishop and his son stood gasping for breath, so completely taken aback that they could not so much as give expression to their consternation in yells, a score of armed men from the Gentile camp came rushing down into the little valley.

There was a sharp, short struggle with the real followers of the Ruddles, but no effectual resistance could be offered, and Bert and his friends were soon in undisputed possession.

"We've lost the game, Smith," resounded the voice of the bishop. "This only remains!"

He made a quick movement, carrying his hand to his mouth, and then fell headlong between his two custodians.

The very gleam of the firelight upon his features sufficed to show that he was dead.

"Look out for the other," cried Bert.

The warning came too late!

For the last time Smith Ruddle had followed his father's example, and their souls had gone away into the Great Unknown together.

CHAPTER L.

AFTER THE NIGHT THE MORNING!

ON a lounge in his sitting-room lay Colonel Hatton, with a pale and rigid countenance, and with eyes in which gleamed a misery not far removed from despair.

At his head knelt the faithful Nora fanning him, while Jonas stood near, with a small tray in his hand, upon which were sundry stimulants and cordials.

"Try a drop," pleaded Nora.

"Well, to please you, I will, Nora," was the colonel's answer, as he suited the action to the word, "but I have almost ceased to hope. This long trial has told upon me. A few days more—"

"Cheer up, sir! Everything will be all right yet. There's Bert and all the rest to be heard from. Listen!"

The rumbling of a carriage on the drive announced a visitor.

"Of course it's no one to harm us, colonel," said Jonas, as he placed his tray on a table. "The boys on guard at the gate will take good care that no one gains admittance here who is not worthy to enter!"

"See who it is, Jonas," commanded the colonel, as he arose to a sitting posture, "and do what's right about giving or refusing admittance."

Jonas hastened to obey.

The carriage soon came to a halt at the door, and the next instant Jonas reappeared, all smiles and pleasure, ushering in the visitors.

They were Mee-an-kah and Monee.

"My son! my son!" cried the old chief, in joyous excitement, the moment his eyes rested upon the colonel. "By what strange fatality is it that I have been so long ignorant of your return to the Ruby Valley? But better late than never, as the old proverb tells us."

He had advanced while speaking with a rapidity that would not have been expected of him, and in another moment had clasped his friend of other years warmly to his breast.

"This is indeed a great pleasure, Mee-an-kah," cried the colonel, as he returned the embrace of the old chief, with interest. "I should have been looking for you all day to day had it not been for my great sorrows and poor health, for I knew yesterday that you were still in the land of the living."

He led the chief to the lounge, placing him gently upon it, and then turned to Monee.

"And this fair girl, old friend?" he asked, taking the maiden's hand and looking admiringly upon her. "She's your daughter, Mee-an-kah?"

"She is, colonel—my last and best."

The colonel seated her upon the foot of the lounge and looked from one to the other.

"How delighted I am to see you both," he murmured.

"You would be still more so, colonel, if you knew why we are here at this moment," said Monee, between smiles and tears.

"Yes, my son—you would indeed," confirmed Mee-an-kah, as tears began flowing down his wrinkled cheeks. "We are here as the messengers of a great joy! That young eagle who is to be my son-in-law—I refer to Teecomo—is as swift of foot, as stout of heart, and he has already brought us the good news which will make you within a few moments, my son, the happiest man in Nevada!"

"Oh, heavens! I am sure you would not arouse hopes at this hour which cannot be realized," cried the colonel, excitedly. "What would you say, chief? My wife! my daughter—"

"Are both as glad of heart at this hour," interrupted Mee-an-kah, "as the sweet girl beside us. Yes, my son, they have been rescued from all their perils, and are now on their way to your arms. Hark!"

How the colonel listened!

And such a roar of happy voices as suddenly resounded upon his hearing!

Such a clatter of hoofs!

Such a rumble of wheels!

"Yes, they come," added Monee, as she tenderly supported the trembling steps of the colonel toward the door. "Look out upon the torches, colonel, and see how they wave and dance with the joy of their bearers! But they are not half so bright as are the eyes which will soon beam upon you!"

Gaining the veranda, with the aid of Mee-an-kah as well as Monee, the colonel looked out upon the joyous procession which had just appeared within view.

"Yes, there they are!" he cried, as his gaze rested upon the fair, glad faces revealed there by the light of a score of torches. "Father of mercies!" and he raised his streaming eyes to heaven, "I thank thee!"

THE END

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